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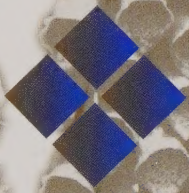
Subject Matters



Edited by

Paul Gifford

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SUBJECT MATTERS

FAUX TITRE

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de langue et littérature françaises
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SUBJECT MATTERS

Subject and Self in French Literature from Descartes to the present

Edited by

Paul Gifford
and
Johnnie Gratton

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INTRODUCTION: THE RETURN OF THE SUBJECT

The title chosen for this volume of essays contains the elements of a programme. It suggests firstly an interest in affirming that the 'subject' 'matters'; or, more fully, that the question of the human subject bears import, carries a certain weight, commands attention, merits consideration. Secondly, and rather less obviously, the title suggests an intention to explore the whole 'matter' of the subject in the plural, from a variety of angles, with what the English language invites us to characterize — in a way worth holding onto, once we stop to think about it — as an 'open mind'. To lean on words or expressions in this way is to exert what Roland Barthes once called a 'subjective pressure'. Finally, and so unobviously that I can only begin to suggest it here and now by exerting just such a pressure, the term 'matter' can be taken, somewhat against the semantic grain, to mark the ultimate tenuousness of the subject as an object of inquiry and reflection. This in so far as, for modern science, admittedly as refracted by the postmodern literary imagination, matter is now known to consist mostly of empty space: 'empty space and points of light'.[1]

The first element in this programme might be thought to go without saying. How could the subject *not* matter? How could the matter of the subject not be considered important? Such questions ignore at their peril a pervasive, massively influential, still active body of critical thought whose sources lie in the period of French intellectual history stretching from the 1950s to the early 1970s: the period dominated by structuralism. Under the sway of structuralism, and subsequently of the theoretical postures made attractive by poststructuralism and deconstructionism, critical thinking about the subject took a distinctly negative turn. The subject, in particular the authorial subject, was simply excluded by some (in the name of scientificity), displaced by others (in favour of alternative

[1] Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (London: Vintage, 1990), p. 8.

principles of meaning production associated with textuality and intertextuality), or, in the case of deconstructive theory, submitted to a process of radical problematization which effectively disqualified it as a reliable point of reference in discussions of textual or literary meaning. In this introductory chapter, I shall first summarize the main thrust of the structuralist-cum-poststructuralist critique of the subject, presenting it in part as the background to the subsequent 'return' of the subject which set in during the mid-1970s. I then go on to examine the current state of play regarding the questions of subjectivity and subjecthood, highlighting various efforts within the field of contemporary critical theory to simultaneously revalidate and attenuate the figure of the subject. Finally I shall try to suggest ways in which, without ever aspiring to the uniformity of a 'school of thought', the contributions making up the present volume relate to and develop work going on in this field. Apart from its thematic focus on the questions of subject and self, the book coheres as a collection of essays dealing specifically with French and francophone writers. Within this limit, the volume manifests considerable scope and breadth, covering authors, texts, and issues from Descartes to the present. While most of the essays examine works of a broadly literary nature, this does not exclude treatment of cultural, ideological, and historical issues; on the contrary, matters of context feature strongly in many of the essays. Within the category of the 'literary', moreover, the volume covers a wide range of types of writing, from established forms such as the novel to relatively marginal and generically unsystematized practices such as the literary preface, automatic writing, and the *récit de rêve*. Equally it mixes certain works regarded as canonical with others more likely to be characterized as marginal or even unknown. Where 'coverage' stops, let 'discovery' begin...

In France especially, the concept of 'subject' has tended to be understood as indelibly marked by a specific line of thought going back to Descartes. Rooted in Descartes, and mediated notably by Hegel, this is the tradition commonly known as the 'philosophy of the subject'. It is a tradition considered to have produced its modern prototype in the form of a stand-alone subject whose essential virtues consist in the power to think and the capacity to know; an insular subject separate from body and gender, distinct from other subjects, severed from context and circumstance, and therefore more likely to be associated with universality than with individuality. The 'sovereign' of all it surveys, this abstracted subject seems conceptually destined to be, in the words of Michèle Le

Dœuff, not only 'le seul sujet au monde' [the only subject *in* the world] but 'le sujet *du* monde' [the subject *of* the world].[2] Is it any wonder, then, that the subject thus construed should have been so strongly and frequently condemned — not just by those whose pro-Nietzschean or anti-humanist positions lead them to favour the inscription of a 'non-subject', but by those such as Paul Ricœur who wish to re-humanize, re-connect, and re-empower the subject, and thus prefer to work in the alternative idiom of 'self' and 'selfhood'?

Ricœur shares with the anti-humanist camp a sense that the term 'subject' remains too irredeemably compromised by its own conceptual history to be put to good use. There are many others, however, who view the term less programmatically. The contemporary French philosopher Alain Renaut, for example, agrees that historically the subject must continue to be understood as both self-founding and self-reflexive. He insists, however, that the 'truth' of the subject is not permanently rooted in Cartesian solipsism. On the contrary, for Renaut, solipsism, both metaphysical and practical, is associated with individualism rather than humanism, with the monadic 'independence' of the individual rather than the self-founded 'autonomy' of the subject. Indeed, on the basis of this distinction, Renaut makes a case for envisaging the subject's quest for autonomy as routed along a fully intersubjective axis and therefore driven by a process of 'communication around a common sphere of principles and values'.[3]

Outside the relatively strict realm of French philosophy, the 'subject' is viewed even more freely. As conference titles such as 'Figures du sujet lyrique' [Figures of the Lyrical Subject] and 'Le Sujet aux prises avec l'histoire' [The Subject at Odds with History] immediately suggest, the subject now in question is no longer assumed to be, or to *have* to be, a 'transcendental' subject, the necessary locus and universal arbiter of knowledge.[4] Once we leave French shores, moreover, we may recall that much philosophy written in English tends to characterize that inflated

[2] Michèle Le Dœuff, 'Du Sujet', in *Cross-References: Modern French Theory and the Practice of Criticism*, ed. by David Kelley and Isabelle Llasera (Oxford: Society for French Studies, 1988), pp. 24–31 (p. 25).

[3] Alain Renaut, *L'Individu: Réflexions sur la philosophie du sujet* (Paris: Hatier, 1995), p. 64.

[4] See *Figures du sujet lyrique*, ed. by Dominique Rabaté (Paris: PUF, 1996); and 'Le Sujet aux prises avec l'histoire', ed. by Claude Burgelin, in *Villa Gillet*, 6 (1998), 115–235.

version of the subject as the 'transcendental *self*'.[5] Anglo-American thought has never had the same investment in the 'subject', nor the same certainty about the term's meaning. Hence, even when certain historical inflections are acknowledged, there tends to be more willingness to consider the term as still very much open to re-negotiation. 'About the exactitudes of this term there is remarkably little agreement,' comment Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift, 'except that the subject is a primary element of being and that the Cartesian notion of the subject as a unitary being made up of disparate parts, mind and body, which is universal, neutral and gender-free, is in error.'[6] Moreover, against those who see in the subject a lost cause or an historically fixed point of reference, Pile and Thrift are interested in the fact that 'what counts as the subject and subjectivity' has, over the course of the 1990s in particular, undergone a visible process of extension.[7] The conceptual flexibility affirmed here perhaps explains why a philosopher such as Calvin O. Schrag, who enthusiastically embraces Paul Ricœur's concern to 'refigure the portrait of the human self' without falling back on its traditional metaphysical supports and epistemological guarantees, should nevertheless find it unnecessary to ditch the 'subject':

> Although I shall not jettison the vocabularies of the 'subject' and 'subjectivity', I shall make an effort to keep these vocabularies contextualized within the density of a concrete 'who experience', the traces of which are most visible in the pursuit of issues pertaining to the who of our quotidian and lived-through communicative practices of speaking, listening, narrating, acting, working, and playing.[8]

The conceptual flexibility evident in these approaches is surely one of the main factors explaining the increasing frequency with which the 'subject' has been invoked since the late 1970s, and this across an increasingly broad range of contemporary critical theory. Pragmatically the 'subject' has acquired the status of a relatively general superordinate term, a term always calling out to be brought under a description. Hence its functionality in theoretical discourse as a distributor of key axes of

[5] See notably Robert C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), *passim*.

[6] Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift, 'Mapping the Subject', in *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation*, ed. by S. Pile and N. Thrift (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 13–51 (p. 11).

[7] Pile and Thrift, p. 11.

[8] Calvin O. Schrag, *The Self after Postmodernity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 4.

opposition (for example, the 'founding' or 'unitary' subject versus the 'decentred' or 'dispersed' subject); as a locus for the establishment of important distinctions and sub-categories (for example, the 'epistemic' in contrast to the 'experiential' subject); and as an inductor of specification (the manner of engagement that will eventually determine a given critic's particular slant on the subject). Appearing by courtesy of the moves allowed in the second of the discursive regimes just evoked, the subject which 'returns' from structuralist exile is neither pejoratively over-specified nor neutrally unspecified, but a concept and a value open to various forms and degrees of positive re-specification in the light of its preceding critique. Such is the perspective affirmed in this introductory essay, if not uniformly across the chapters of this book.

The concept of structuralism took root in the 1950s, a decade during which Claude Lévi-Strauss came to the fore as the leading exponent of post-existentialist thought. In his quest for models that might give anthropology a scientific basis, Lévi-Strauss turned to structural linguistics and, in particular, to the phonological theory of the Russian linguist Nikolai Trubetzkoy. Like the phonologist, the anthropologist was now required to study not isolated terms but the relations between terms, and the systems holding these relations together. As postulated in such a context, the notion of system implies the existence of unconscious symbolic structures, structures that are not available to the consciousness of a speaking, experiencing, or acting subject. Thus, whereas the existentialist and phenomenological traditions still influential in the 1950s argued for a degree of continuity between reality and experience, early structuralism replaced *le réel* with the image of a construct whose structural foundations necessarily escaped the subject. In effect, the subject was relegated to the status of a fish in water, incapable of yielding objective or even valuable intuitive knowledge of the environment in which it is immersed. Avoiding immersion, Lévi-Strauss espoused the principle of the 'distant gaze', seeing in it the perspective which would legitimize anthropology as a science. From the very outset, then, the 'scientificity' of the structuralist project was a quality guaranteed — or, to put it more critically, an effect produced — by the de-legitimization of the subject. To quote Tzvetan Todorov, writing at a time when he had renounced his own structuralist past: 'structuralism, in its Lévi-Straussian sense, is a method for studying human beings that refuses to take their subjectivity

into account'.[9]

As the structuralist paradigm expanded to make room for the interventions of Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault, so there emerged a new syncretic mix more and more clearly dominated by anti-humanism. To review all the aspects of this anti-humanist consensus would entail a lengthy discussion going over ground already comprehensively covered in a number of accounts of recent French intellectual history, most notably by François Dosse in his invaluable *Histoire du structuralisme*.[10] Instead, I shall briefly resume how, under attack from the new intellectual ascendancy, the subject came to be further disempowered.

The empowered subject of humanism can be imagined as what Roland Barthes once called 'a point of irradiation', a hot core from which lines of continuity or connection spread outwards towards various objects of consciousness or experience. These radial connections are the very lifelines of the subject as an intellectual category. Conversely one can picture the *dis*empowered subject as one whose radial connections have been cut, broken, or so problematized as to leave them useless. As I have already indicated, the most important continuity at stake here is that linking subjective experience to objective reality, a continuity which cannot be brought into question without also casting doubt on the claims of experience as a way to, or a form of, knowledge. Duly deprived of its power of irradiation, the subject as put through the mill of Louis Althusser's 'scientific' Marxism is transformed into a mystified object of invisible forces attributable to a new subject of history: ideology.[11] To introduce another key term belonging to the same scheme, the immediate or ordinary knowledge accruing to consciousness is considered to be, almost by definition, a form of *méconnaissance*, variously translated as 'misrecognition', 'miscognition', or 'misconstrual'.

As a modern concept, *méconnaissance* goes back to Marxism and psychoanalysis. For Marx, 'false consciousness' left the subject mystified, not knowing where its true interests lay. For Freud, the efforts of the

[9] Tzvetan Todorov, 'Lévi-Strauss', in *New French Thought: Political Philosophy*, ed. by Mark Lilla (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 38–53 (p. 50). This essay was originally published in English in 1993.

[10] François Dosse, *Histoire du structuralisme*, 2 vols (Paris: Livre de poche, coll. biblio essais, 1995; first publ. 1992).

[11] On the differences between 'scientific' or structuralist marxism and the existentialist marxism of an earlier generation, see Vincent Descombes, *Le Même et l'autre: quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française (1933–1978)* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), pp. 139–49.

conscious subject were always being compromised by the work of unconscious forces. As Joseph Dunne reminds us, however, if Marxism and psychoanalysis encroach on the sovereignty of the self, they do not renounce a certain ideal of selfhood: 'To the contrary, their recognition of what they analyse as alienation presupposes some notion of unalienated self-possession; and in each case the analysis is in the service of a therapeutics through which human subjects can be enabled to regain this self-possession.'[12] Unlike such forms of alienation, unlike Gidean self-deception or Sartrian bad faith, structuralist *méconnaissance* fundamentally disabled the human subject. And it did so not only under the sway of anti-humanism but in the name of science, for the long-term ambition of structuralists in the 1960s and early 70s was to unite a raft of disciplines around a single scientific methodology based notably on models drawn from linguistic theory that gave precedence to relationships over entities and to signs over referents: 'penser sans le Sujet, pour accéder à la Science', as Dosse summarizes it.[13]

It took more than the upheaval of May '68 to consign structuralism to the stockpile of intellectual history. Not until the mid-1970s did it become clear that the structuralist paradigm had run out of steam. With French left-wing politics in disarray, enthusiasm for Althusserian structuralist Marxism vanished almost overnight. Just as the search for a common methodology was now looking intellectually less necessary, so the core combination of scientism and anti-humanism now appeared ideologically less attractive. A new eclectic and non-sectarian spirit was in the air, with more and more intellectuals abandoning the old ethics of conviction for a more individualized ethics of responsibility. With structuralism in retreat, the way was left open for the dimension of human agency and experience to be reintroduced into academic disciplines throughout the arts and social sciences. Whether as a focal object of study, a methodological principle of research, or as an asserted value in its own right, the 'subject' was back.

The 'return of the subject' is arguably a very misleading catchphrase, for the subject which returns is, more often than not, a far cry from *homo*

[12] Joseph Dunne, 'Beyond Sovereignty and Deconstruction: The Storied Self', in *Paul Ricœur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, ed. by Richard Kearney (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 137–57 (p. 140).

[13] Dosse, II, p. 315.

clausus (Elias), the 'Cartesian' subject, the 'full', 'founding', or 'sovereign' subject critiqued not only by structuralist and post-structuralist thought but by a strong philosophical and intellectual current, essentially inspired by Nietzsche, running right through the twentieth century. To use Roland Barthes's metaphor, the subject returns at 'another point on the spiral', where it bears the traces of its problematization. The subject emerges now as far less disengaged or autonomous. It is relational and contextual, no longer what Charles Taylor calls 'a centre of monological consciousness', no longer definable independently of location, body, other, etc.

That the 'return' of the subject takes place in the light of its preceding critique may be gauged by the fact that many of the most prominent agents of change in the late 1970s and early 80s had themselves been at the heart of that critique during the heyday of structuralist activism. Among those whose shifts of position were both dramatic and symptomatic, one cannot fail to single out the cases of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault.

Just as Foucault had predicted the imminent death of man in the preface to his 1966 work, *Les Mots et les choses*, so Barthes, a few years later, went on in a celebrated essay to announce 'The Death of the Author' (1968). The 'author' Barthes was so keen to see dead and buried was a general institution embodied in a specific figure: that of a phallogocentric host, a god-like dispenser of meaning, standing over and above his readers in an arrogant, distinctly masculine pose. His alternative to the author was the 'scriptor', not so much an effective subject (a site of consciousness, psychological depth, or expressive capacity) as a purely material subject whose hand traces a 'field without origin', a text that is horizontally interconnected yet vertically non-derived.

This high point in the rejection of effective subjectivity turned out to be in some respects a dead end, and in other respects a passageway towards a consideration of new modes of subjectivity. From *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, his self-portrait of 1975, through to his last book, *La Chambre claire* (1980), Barthes became progressively less guarded and ironic in his rehabilitation of the subject. Written in the shadow of his mother's death, *La Chambre claire* takes the form an extended sequential quest narrative, set out in chapters rather than fragments. In its search for the singularity of the mother, and for a way of 'rendering' that singularity, the book becomes an ethical reclamation of

the rights of individual experience, in which the relatively hygienic idiom of the 'subject' is overtaken by an emotional concern for the 'truth' or 'essence' of identity. It is indeed ironic that, at a time when students all over the Anglo-American world were still being fed a diet of Barthes based on the much anthologized 'Death of the Author', Barthes himself, Barthes on the eve of his own death, had already moved radically beyond the terms of the (post)structuralist critique of the subject.

Like the early Barthes, the early Foucault embraced the anti-humanist cause with great relish. In a major interview conducted in 1978, published in 1980, and reprinted in the invaluable fourth volume of the *Dits et écrits* (1994), Foucault himself explains this anti-humanism as stemming from the hostility he felt during the 1960s towards a then institutionally dominant 'philosophy of the subject' rooted in the tradition of Cartesian thought, enhanced by a strong injection of Hegelianism, and perpetuated in the post-war period by Sartrian existentialism and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

As a writer committed to 'une entreprise de dé-subjectivation',[14] the early Foucault regarded the whole question of the subject with a mixture of hostility and indifference. The move away from this negativism can be described schematically as occurring in two stages. In the first stage, the urge to 'de-subjectify' develops into a more constructive and concerned interest in various kinds of 'objectification' (*objectivation*) of the subject, ranging from outright coercive 'subjection' in the case of the disciplinary control exercised via the combined procedures of power and knowledge, to the classificatory production of types of subject — the speaking, working, and living subjects, for example — through their discursive problematization as 'objects' of scientific inquiry. During this period, corresponding essentially to the 1970s, Foucault's insistence on the technological effectiveness and historical pervasiveness of modes of 'objectification' appears to exclude the possibility of insurgency in the form of a questioning, resisting, or innovating subject.

The second stage of Foucault's turn towards a more accommodating view of the subject coincides with his 'late' period, covering the years 1980–1984. Here, as Foucault becomes increasingly concerned (and for increasingly personal reasons) with the whole dimension of ethics, he turns to Ancient Greek philosophy in order to study how human beings,

[14] Michel Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits 1954–1988*, ed. by D. Defert and F. Ewald, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), IV, p. 43.

by implementing various 'technologies' of the self, by engaging in a process of 'care' of the self, can turn themselves into active, creative, moral subjects. In so far as Foucault's preoccupation is now with 'the constitution of the subject as an object for himself',[15] the notion of objectification still obtains. But it is significant that, from 1982 onwards, as if anxious to distinguish this commendable mode of 'objectification' from the more pernicious modes covered by that term in previous studies, Foucault introduced in its stead the term *subjectivation*. Foucault's definition of *subjectivation* as 'the process whereby one obtains the constitution of a subject, more precisely of a subjectivity',[16] suggests that the term is more appropriately rendered in English as 'subjectivisation' than as 'subjectification'. Thus, in tracing a route from an initial project of *dé-subjectivation* to a final focus on the procedures and benefits of *subjectivation*, Foucault's own conceptual idiom strongly supports the view that a radical turnabout, a dramatic return to or of the subject, has taken place over the course of his intellectual career.

With the benefit of hindsight, Barthes's famous essay of 1968 can be read as using its extravagantly marketable rhetoric of the 'death' of the author to simultaneously disguise and articulate a more positive interest in a new, attenuated form of subjectivity: one allergic to 'coming the heavy', whether as an author or as any other kind of subject 'supposed-to-know'. As Stephen Schwartz demonstrates later in this volume, a similar springing-back of the subject in the midst of its critique may be detected in the work of the early Foucault, now in the form of a 'symptom' or 'return of the repressed'. This kind of reading does not, however, in any way invalidate the view that, over a number of years spanning the 1970s, both writers also underwent a gradual but ultimately marked change of attitude towards the question of the subject, a change signalled most clearly by their growing desire to channel their dissatisfaction with traditional models of the subject into the promotion of new, postmodern forms of subjectivity. Moreover, compared with the tentative or symptomatic forms of subjectivity that appear in their earlier writings, the forms envisaged in their later work are more strongly configured, with Barthes invoking the claims of both affectivity and experience, and Foucault investing the subject with the capacity for self-constitution as a moral agent. The fact that both Barthes and Foucault

[15] Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits* IV, p. 633.

[16] Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits* IV, p. 706.

found it impossible to hold for long to a wholly negative discourse concerning the subject backs up Seán Burke's pointed suggestion that 'it would seem that all antihumanist discourse finally makes overture to a new form of humanism, that the rejection of the subject functions as a passageway between conceptions of subjectivity'.[17]

As Hans Bertens has pointed out, postmodernism since its humble beginnings in the 1950s has meant different things to different people at different conceptual levels. The result was, and still is, Bertens maintains, 'a massive but also exhilarating confusion that has given important new impulses to and opened new territories for intellectual exploration'.[18] Though attempts have been made to construe postmodernism as synonymous with poststructuralism, the 'exhilarating confusion' highlighted by Bertens has in the long run opened up an eclectic critical horizon on which the hard-line legacy of structuralist anti-humanism provides but one point of reference among others. In contrast, since the deaths of Barthes and Foucault in the early 1980s, one of the most significant developments in the field of critical thought has been the confirmation, diversification, and elaboration of the trend popularly known as the 'return of the subject'. There is no doubt that this development has occurred partly as a reaction against the structuralist paradigm: a point most forcefully made by feminist critics, advocates of so-called autobiographical or confessional criticism, and exponents of identity politics, where it is common for a gendered and personalized voice to complain openly about the disempowering effects of the (post)structuralist critique of the subject. That said, the most salient feature of this development has been the attempt to pursue a restored sense of the various dimensions of human agency not against, but in the light of, the preceding critique of the subject: a critique now recognized more and more as having peaked with structuralism but as not being limited to it, either conceptually or historically. Once more, it is important here to recognize that the 'return' of the subject, except perhaps when animated by the thematics of spectrality or repression, is a punchy metaphor for what may more properly be understood as a

[17] See Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), p. 114.

[18] Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 10–11.

refiguration of the subject. By this, as already suggested, I mean specifically a revalidation of the subject — and increasingly of the categories of 'self', 'person' and 'individual' — as the site of various capacities worthy of our attention and respect, accompanied and informed by an insistence on the attenuated nature of the subject in question. Through the work of attenuation, the form of subjectivity being described or promoted comes to be distinguished from the more traditionally 'solid' paradigm evidenced in — for example — the subject as founding instance, the *cogito* as substance, the ego as seat and executive of personal identity, or the self as a bundle of permanent characteristics. Through attenuation, the critic seeks on behalf of the subject to formulate a set of credentials that will earn endorsement because they are of the present: they don't simply 'come back' from the past. The precedence of 'refiguration in the present' over 'return from the past' was already being signalled strongly in the mid-1970s by the emergence in France of a new practice of autobiographical writing, itself highly conscious of its status as a present performance, and correspondingly freed from any sense of being bound by generic rules to concentrate on re-presenting a past self, let alone a pre-given self.

In order to give an idea of the current state of play within the humanities and social sciences regarding the question of subjecthood, I shall now briefly examine the contemporary refiguration of the subject in terms of four key principles. In the final part of this chapter, I shall then go on to use these same principles as my point of departure for introducing the remaining contributions to the volume. Among the most influential examples of recent refigurations of the subject, I focus in particular on the philosophical theories of Charles Taylor and Paul Ricœur, not least because the recognition accorded across a wide range of disciplines and interest-groups to Taylor's *Sources of the Self* (1989) and Ricœur's *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990) itself bears eloquent witness to the 'return' of the subject within a context of critical thought alerted by its own modern history to the dangers of intellectual dogmatism.

The first of these principles, ongoingness, takes issue with the still commonly assumed image of selfhood as a bastion of essential, unchanging identity. In contrast to such fixity, much contemporary thought tends to construe the self as being continuously constituted, not just reflected or expressed, by its activities and engagements in the present. Such a dynamic of self-constitution is continuous in the sense

that it is ongoing. The closer one gets to the postmodernist end of the critical spectrum, the less such ongoingness will be thought of as cumulative in nature or completive in function. Within the genealogy of contemporary thought, the prototype for this way of construing the subject may be found in Emile Benveniste's theory of enunciation, where subjectivity is traced to the speaker's capacity to posit him/herself as an 'I'. As Benveniste himself most famously put it: 'est "ego" qui dit "ego"' [whoever *says* 'ego' is 'ego'].[19] Moving from the 1960s to the 1970s, a more precarious vision of ongoingness emerged in the work of Julia Kristeva. Through her stress on the gaps, elisions, and alterities inhabiting the subject, Kristeva came to posit the notion of the *sujet en procès*, meaning not just the subject 'in process', in the course of constitution on an ongoing basis, but also the subject 'on trial', under constant threat of destabilization. Although versions of this strongly attenuated refiguration of the subject continue to recur into the 1980s and 90s, all too often as a kind of ritual mark of respect to the post-structuralist paradigm, the rhetoric of the 'trial' of the subject, evoking memories of a faded avant-gardism, has been progressively filtered out of most critical discourses engaged in the analysis of subjectivity.

Over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, with the work of Foucault now strongly in the ascendant, a more concrete, constructive, and purposive image of ongoingness began to emerge as the idiom of process became increasingly subsumed into that of practice. But for the late Foucault's foregrounding of the idea of *pratique de soi* [practice of self], the figure of what Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift call 'the subject as primarily derived in practice', the subject whose understanding comes from 'the ceaseless flow of conduct',[20] would probably not have gained the wide currency it presently enjoys. In the ancient Greek and Roman schools of thought, philosophy was a way of life, a long-term investment based on a regular programme of spiritual exercises. For Foucault, such exercises amounted to a practice of self, a set of techniques devoted to the constitution, transformation, and moral betterment of the self over time. Though there was never any question for Foucault of crudely transplanting such techniques, or the philosophy behind them, into the present, he nevertheless clearly envisaged the broad notion of 'practice of self' as being fruitfully applicable to the present in so far as it offered a

[19] Emile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, vol. I (Paris: Gallimard, coll. Tel, 1976; first publ. 1966), p. 260.

[20] Pile and Thrift, 'Mapping the Subject', in *Mapping the Subject*, op. cit., (p. 27).

framework for the development of a non-essentialist understanding of subjectivity.

One of the most prominent versions of selfhood as ongoing process to emerge during the 1990s has been that set out in Paul Ricœur's theory of 'narrative identity'. Ricœur's starting-point is to distinguish selfhood from sameness. The difference between sameness (*idem*) and selfhood (*ipse*) amounts, as Ricœur himself puts it, to 'the difference between a formal or substantial identity and a narrative identity'.[21] There is no self-knowledge without self-interpretation, claims Ricœur, and by telling stories about myself and my life, whether to others or to myself, I engage in one of the salient modes of self-interpretation. The narrative identity of an individual or a community can never be finally assured, however. Although the stories whereby I know myself are valuable for constructing durable properties and so conferring self-constancy, they do not eclipse my awareness that I could weave other stories from the same narrative material. Thus narrative identity is an essentially unstable, problematic realization of selfhood. Given the growing contemporary interest in uncertainty as both an object of study and a value in its own right, it is more likely that such instability will be regarded as an advantage than as a limitation. The main advantage as Ricœur himself sees it lies in the way the notion of narrative identity brings constancy and provisionality, permanence and change, into dialectical contact with one another: 'A la différence de l'identité abstraite du Même, l'identité narrative, constitutive de l'ipséité, peut inclure le changement, la mutabilité, dans la cohésion d'une vie' [Unlike the abstract identity of the Same, narrative identity, constitutive of selfhood, can include change, mutability, within the cohesion of a life].[22] Ricœur specifies that he is concerned with 'identity' in the sense of 'a category of practice'.[23] In this and other respects, his notion of 'narrative identity' has more affinities with the late Foucault's 'practice of self' than has yet been admitted. Indeed, the dynamic of narrative identity even bears comparison with Kristeva's 'subject in process' in so far as, on the crest of its own ongoing dynamic, 'l'identité narrative ne cesse de se faire et de se

[21] Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit III: Le temps raconté* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), p. 355. More generally on 'narrative identity', see ibid., pp. 354–59, and Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), pp. 137–98.

[22] *Temps et récit III*, p. 355.

[23] *Temps et récit III*, p. 355.

défaire' [narrative identity never ceases to make and unmake itself].[24] Ricœur, on the other hand, is clearly more concerned to stress the potential for a healthy balance between narrative closure and the open-endedness implied by the constant possibility of narrativizing anew or otherwise, between the forces of making and those of unmaking. As such, his approach to selfhood via the ongoingness of narrative identity may be said to have helped shape a contemporary view of the subject that is itself generally more 'balanced' than it was under the sway of (post)structuralist negativism. On this understanding, the subject is no longer a substrate, no longer a subject firmly in place, yet nor is it a subject kicked out of the ball-park. Neither classically fixed nor deconstructively liquidated, it is a subject in play, a subject in practice, or, to reread Kristeva via Ricœur, a subject in process.

The mere fact that the year 1975 saw the publication of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, Hélène Cixous's essay 'Le Rire de la méduse', and Foucault's study *Surveiller et punir*, should suffice to establish that the 'return' of the subject in the mid-1970s overlapped strongly with a return of the body. All three texts went on to become enormously influential, not least in the way they helped establish *embodiedness* as one of the key principles informing the refiguration of the subject. These writers did not, however, share the same critical agenda.

Barthes in his self-portrait foregrounded the body as his *mot-mana*, or '*mana*-word', marking a cherished value too elusive to be definable as a concept and too pervasive to be intelligible as the simple other or opposite of mind. Regularly brought into play through his interest in theatre and his espousal of hedonism, the body became for Barthes as he moved into the 1970s a major element in his attempt to envisage a material subject as opposed to a disembodied psychological subject — hence his 1974 definition of the body as 'le sujet lesté de son désir et de son inconscient' [the subject laden with its desire and its unconscious].[25] The body, then, is the subject rendered porous and uncertain by all that exceeds consciousness or reason or judgment. To apply a pertinent distinction borrowed by Barthes from Lacan, the body helps identify an insistent as opposed to consistent subject, a subject marked by the

[24] *Temps et récit III*, p. 358.

[25] Roland Barthes, 'Roland Barthes contre les idées reçues' (1974), in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by E. Marty, 3 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1993–95), III, pp. 70–74 (p. 73).

symptomatic, the unwilled, and the unpredictable.[26] In *Barthes par Barthes*, the 'insistence' of the body has even come to be seen as the factor determining the subject's likes and dislikes, and therefore as one of the factors informing his/her broader value-system. Finally, to the extent that the body is equated with 'irreducible difference'; to the extent that stereotypes are moments of discourse 'where the body is lacking'; and to the extent that writing is the product of 'a body', it is clear that Barthes in 1975 was returning via a materialist idiom, with all the intellectual protection that such an idiom still afforded at the time, to the paradigm of individuality.

For Hélène Cixous, it is not primarily individuality but femininity that derives from the body. This in the form of a system of gender-specific drives which are at the same time marked in and as representation, and to that extent culturally produced. For Cixous, then, the body is caught up in social and not just biological processes. What most fired readers' imaginations in the mid-1970s, however, and what went on to cause serious dissent among a later generation of feminists, was Cixous's highlighting of the psycho-biological, as found notably in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' where she engages in a poetic promotion of the female body as a resource at once abundantly maternal and inexhaustibly libidinal: a 'prodigious' economy of drives capable of subverting 'systems of exchange based on masculine thrift'.[27] A key aspect of her vision of a new, insurgent *écriture féminine*, such promotion resulted in images of writing as childbirth, ink as milk, and so on. Charges of essentialism from less poetically orientated feminists were bound to follow. That said, rooted in the work of Cixous (as also in that of Luce Irigaray, and to a lesser extent Julia Kristeva), the urge to think feminine subjectivity through the flows, rhythms, and intensities of the female body, albeit in critical discourses heavy with anti-essentialist caveats, remains an important strand in contemporary feminist criticism.

Unlike Barthes and Cixous, Michel Foucault in his genealogical mode does not set out to celebrate the body. In *Surveiller et punir*, he is concerned rather with analysing the discovery of the body during the

[26] For an illuminating essay on this aspect of Barthes's writing, see Jane Gallop, 'The Bodily Enigma', in *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 11–20.

[27] Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (first publ. in French in 1975), in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Press, 1981), pp. 245–64 (p. 252).

classical age as the target and object of power. Foucault considers power relations to have an immediate hold upon the body, investing it, marking it, training it, torturing it, transforming it into a 'docile body', at once productive and subjected.[28] According to Elizabeth Grosz, the author of an extremely rich and wide-ranging work on the body in the context of contemporary feminist thought, Foucault usefully demonstrated 'how transformations in conceptions of subjectivity or self are a consequence of changing investments of power in the body'.[29] Grosz further considers that, in the course of this demonstration, Foucault gave feminism food for thought by developing the Nietzschean model of 'the social inscription of corporeal surfaces'. Grosz continues to hold serious reservations about Foucault, however, partly because he inflected the body-writing model so negatively, stressing the body's passivity over its forces and capacities (*VB* 122). Indeed, in her concern to elaborate a positive image of embodiedness, she turns — more precisely she *re*-turns — to the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty: a gesture highly symptomatic of the growing critical desire to explore a broader resource-base than that delimited by the poststructuralist canon. In the work of Merleau-Ponty, Grosz finds a theory both fiercely opposed to Cartesian mind/body dualism and sharply contrasting with 'the bracketing off of experience in much of poststructuralism and antihumanism' (*VB* 95). By locating experience midway between mind and body, Merleau-Ponty brings into focus the 'body-subject' of corporeal feminism. His theory is thereby said to chime with 'feminism's major contribution to the production and structure of knowledges — its necessary reliance on lived experience, on experiential acquaintance as a touchstone or criterion of the validity of theoretical postulates' (*VB* 94). For Grosz, then, an anti-patriarchal politics is dependent on a valorization of 'experiential acquaintance', of what others have called 'proxemics', the study of the dimension of the at-hand and the first-hand that remained necessarily undetected and deliberately undervalued by Lévi-Strauss's 'distant gaze'.

The third of the four principles I wish to advance as keystones in the refiguration of the subject is that of embeddedness, where the accent is more on being situated than being constrained. This is a term that

[28] On 'Les corps dociles', see Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), pp. 137–71.

[29] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 151. Henceforth *VB*, with page references incorporated in the text.

deliberately echoes embodiedness, for not only does my third principle overlap strongly with the second, by some accounts it would subsume the second. In Dalia Judowitz's analysis of Cartesian philosophy, for example, the universal subject of truth is said to be established by the 'negative procedure' of 'emptying the subject of any content other than that of thought': a strategy which leads to 'the disembodiment of the subject and to its isolation and autonomous constitution as an entity independent of historical or social context'.[30] Disembodiment here is but one facet of a broader defection from context. Being embodied and being embedded (always already immersed in a context) converge again when Christopher Falzon defines the former as meaning not just that we 'have' a body but that 'we exist concretely and materially in the midst of the world, and as such, [...] that we are able to be influenced, affected and conditioned by history':[31] this in the context of the way both Descartes and Kant deny embodiment.

Assertions of the principle of embeddedness, then, tend to emerge primarily from critiques of the Cartesian subject and its historical offspring. This was particularly the case under the structuralist/poststructuralist dispensation, where 'critiques of the Cartesian subject' were better known as '*the* critique of the subject'. Particularly but not exclusively. In fact, repudiations of Cartesianism, often aimed more at the Cartesian legacy than at Descartes himself, have been rife in modern philosophy across a spectrum and a time-frame far wider than those occupied by (post)structuralism. In his magnum opus, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989), Charles Taylor cites the examples of Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and the later Wittgenstein as being among the most 'insightful' of philosophers in the twentieth century to refute the Cartesian picture of the 'disengaged subject'.[32] Using images very close to those of Judovitz, Taylor represents the disengaged subject as 'withdrawn' from ordinary first-person experience. The point of disengagement is to gain control, to be able to objectify: a procedure which, after Descartes, became increasingly turned towards

[30] Dalia Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes: The Origins of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 87.

[31] Christopher Falzon, *Foucault and Social Dialogue: Beyond Fragmentation* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 26.

[32] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; repr. 1992), p. 514. Henceforth *SS*, with page references incorporated in the text.

the subject itself. But gaining control, seeing things clearly and distinctly, involves 'withdrawing from our normal way of being in the world' (*SS* 162): a movement which leaves the subject unsituated, 'extensionless', 'nowhere but in this power to fix things as objects' (*SS* 172). In modern times, claims Taylor, the disengaged subject has become capable of objectifying not only the surrounding world but also the domain of interiority: emotions and inclinations, fears and compulsions. Often viewed as an ideal, this modern figure has evolved into 'one way of construing ourselves, which we find it hard to shake off' (*SS* 160). This is the figure Taylor seeks to challenge in the second chapter of *Sources*, 'The Self in Moral Space' (*SS* 25–52). Here Taylor refigures the subject in terms of knowing where one stands, thereby positing an essential link between 'identity' and a kind of 'orientation' in 'moral space' (*SS* 28). Such a spatial metaphor necessarily implies corporeal location, and thus a degree of embodiedness. But Taylor's refiguration is more evidently geared towards promoting embeddedness in general. Rejecting the autonomism of the disengaged subject derived from Descartes, Taylor wants to argue that 'doing without frameworks is utterly impossible for us': I am a self only among other selves, only in relation to certain interlocutors, only within 'webs of interlocution' (*SS* 36, 39): a phrase that can be taken to imply social and historical as well as individual 'interlocutors'. Embeddedness does not bed me down, does not produce a fixed subject, because, to invoke a more recent vocabulary of Taylor, it is aligned on the social plane with 'the understanding that identities are formed in open dialogue' rather than on an isolated, 'monological' basis.[33] Embeddedness is to be understood, then, as steering a course between the arrogant centredness of the classical subject and the impotent de-centredness of the (post)structuralist subject.

Embeddedness is one of the properties that leads Paul Ricœur *in Soi-même comme un autre* (1990) to speak of the 'self' rather than the 'subject' (see above, pp. 3–4). While embeddedness marks out this self as a subject-in-context, Ricœur's philosophical rehabilitation of the self goes one step further by invoking the principle of otherness, or relationality to the other, as internally and not just externally constitutive of the subject. (One is reminded of Habermas's account of the subject, where the 'self-relation' emerges out of an 'interactive context'.) Ricœur

[33] Charles Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition', in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. by Amy Gutman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 25–73 (p. 36).

draws a fundamental distinction between *idem*-identity, implying sameness, and *ipse*-identity, which resists any assumption of immutability. The latter founds an attenuated concept of the self notably in so far as it acknowledges the formative power of the other-than-self, the work of 'alterity' at the heart of 'ipseity'. Even the concept of 'character', traditionally invoked to support the idea of essentially unchanging identity, is re-read by Ricœur as consisting of a set of 'acquired identifications' whereby an indeterminate quantity of otherness ['de l'autre'] enters into the composition of the same.[34] Just as Taylor disagrees with the common picture of the self as 'drawing its purposes, goals, and life-plans out of itself, seeking "relationships" only insofar as they are "fulfilling"' (*SS* 39), so Ricœur rejects the 'self-positing ego' in favour of a formative dialectic of self-recognition via the ongoing situational dynamic of one's being-affected by the other.[35] The ethical implications of envisaging inter-subjectivity as being coeval with intra-subjectivity, and not just a secondary, subsequent, or peripheral order, relate Ricœur's work to that of Levinas and Todorov in France, and beyond that to a widespread concern right across the postmodernist spectrum with figures of alterity: with the need to recognize our 'own' being as being-with and being-for the other; and with the need to acknowledge the instance of that 'other' in all its irreducibility to the coordinates of 'our' world.

The refiguration of the subject that has been going on since the late 1970s will inevitably find its most direct and tangible forms of expression in the literature of the same period. At the same time, that process of refiguration itself forms part of a broader cultural climate which has affected and inflected recent critical understanding of works situated throughout literary history.

Descartes and Rousseau are cases in point. In his chapter on Descartes, C. E. J. Caldicott joins a growing body of opinion that contests the stereotyped view of *Discours de la méthode* as a work which straightforwardly deposits the founding theory of the founding subject, leaving future generations equally straightforwardly to applaud, modify, or

[34] Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, op. cit., p. 146.

[35] See Ricœur, *Soi-même*, p. 380.

deplore that theory. To envisage the *Discours* as a 'literary' work is to challenge that stereotype by staying on the alert for signs of a plural economy; for conflicting moods, shifting perspectives, changing inflections, which in various ways interrupt and undercut the 'apparently voiceless rationality of a carefully constructed method', notably in so far as they seem to articulate an 'other' narrative voice. For this is the voice of an empirical subject whose evasive and aimless ways ensure that it can never be accounted for by the functional economies of both a transcendental subject and a philosophical method that have come to be regarded as quintessentially 'Cartesian'.

Rousseau is another canonical author whose work has inspired new readings animated by the new forms of critical attention consonant with the 'return' of the subject. Invoking the ground-breaking work of the American political scientist Christopher Kelly, Michael O'Dea underlines the importance of the role of the *other* in an autobiography, Rousseau's *Confessions*, that has always been regarded as a quintessential book of the *self*. Thus the urge to declare one's own difference, with which Rousseau's autobiography is so strongly associated in the history of Western self-representation, is shown to be underpinned, and to some extent undercut, by various modes of what in the previous section I described as embeddedness or relationality. By a complication not dissimilar to that uncovered in the text of Descartes, the subject in Rousseau's *Confessions* is shown to be elusive in the midst of the autographic confidence that would seize it.

Abandoning the customary view of Rousseau as a great innovator in the realm of autobiography, Carole Dornier draws on a highly contemporary critical nexus comprising the work of Pierre Hadot and the late Foucault (notably in *Le Souci de soi*) to propose a reading of the *Rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire* as a work inscribed in the Ancient Greek philosophical tradition of the care of the self. In this case, writing is no longer the outcome of a completed project, external to the writing subject, but an ongoing practice. Writing so conceived does not so much describe the spiritual exercise as constitute it. The hypothesis advanced in Dornier's chapter is that the *Rêveries* show an alternative way of founding one's subjecthood: the way of a *technè tou biou*, a set of practices dominated by concern for oneself — the precondition of any genuine concern for others. Paradoxically, the act of re-situating the *Rêveries* in an ancient tradition also turns out to realign the text with issues raised by Foucault's contribution to late twentieth-century ethics,

itself inscribed in the same general movement of 'return' as that which has sponsored the refiguration of the subject.

The 'linguistic turn' that has had such a profound impact on developments in the human sciences over the twentieth century has inevitably continued to play a key role in contemporary figurations of the subject. Over the course of the 1990s, the broad notion that, through discourse, the self is called into being as a speaking (and listening) subject has taken a distinctly narrative turn, with critics of diverse persuasions taking a strong interest in Paul Ricœur's theory of 'narrative identity'. Gabrielle Chamarat's chapter on Nerval underlines the fact that, in France, interest remains equally strong in the general principle of which the act of narrating oneself or one's own story remains but one instance: the principle of *énonciation* (enunciation, discourse as first-person performance). Nerval's introduction to his famous work, *Les Filles du feu* (1854), is shown to announce and account for the book that follows it in a most unusual way, in that it positions its enunciation 'hors raison', outside or beyond reason. Nerval's cultivation of a self empowered by artistic identity at the cost of social 'dis-identification', and of a certain kind of creative 'reasoning' at the cost of 'reason', is pursued through the multiple connections and dissonances he sets up within one short text between different subjects of enunciation, some of whom — the real Dumas, the fictional Brisacier — speak out of embedded discourses. Nerval's madness, or unreason, is thus seen to lie in what is otherwise his way of reasoning, and his *raison d'être*: namely, his artistic identity.

The inscription of the subject in and as enunciative process continues to loom large in Ian Higgins's analysis of an unjustly ignored French novel of the First World War, Adrien Bertrand's *L'Appel du sol*. In a fiction that might at first appear to be representing the failure of a dying French soldier to think clearly, the constant blurring of oppositions, not least between the 'good' French and the 'bad' Germans, turns out to carry an intellectually potent and ethically salutary message. Oppositions unravel into dialectical differences, differences into questions. In turn, the response to each question turns out always to be another question. To go back to my earlier discussion, this process of unravelling may be said to activate the principles of ongoingness and relationality, for it seems to be rooted in a particular conception of the self not just as the co-realization of a grammatical subject and a cognitive subject, but equally as the co-implication of a cognitive subject and a cognitive object. To

take Higgins's pointed example, a subject realized in killing, or awareness of having killed, is also realized in dying, or in the awareness of someone's being killed. Under this 'ecological' form of description, it is hard to say where the subject *stops* being realized, hence its 'infinitely regressive' status. Despite this, Higgins finds much evidence in Bertrand's novel to support the view that the subject is equally valued as the source of those very realizations. It emerges most fully, then, as both that which is 'there', beyond question, the producer *of* analogy, and that which remains ever elusive, in question and as questioning, knowable only *through* analogy.

Higgins's ecological subject overlaps to some degree with Myriam Boucharenc's 'plural author', the term she uses to describe the dynamic relationality of self to other found in the collaborative process that yielded the founding texts of the Surrealist movement. Closely associated with automatic writing, that most ongoing of twentieth-century poetic practices, plural authorship clearly challenges the traditional image of the author as man-in-charge. Under conditions of automatism, the writers come to occupy the position of bystanders or transcribers rather than overseers, and the writing itself fast becomes subject-less in the sense of 'not governed from the outside'. Blurring emerges once more as a key theme. The alliance of automatism and plural authorship erases the borderlines of literary property, dialogizes the poetic text, and invites a transformation of reader into writer. In reality, however, the figure of the plural author veers psychologically between favourable forms of 'alterity' and threatening forms of 'alteration', and, at a more practical level, between collective utopia and personal agenda. In the end, asserts Boucharenc, the desacralization of the author could not prevent the return of the author, whether as Janus or as Proteus.

A pattern is beginning to emerge whereby, in different ways, a given writer's perspective on the figure of the subject or author seems to call first for acknowledgement of a process of attenuation, and subsequently for an understanding that the attenuation in question leads less to a final eclipse than to a persistence, a return, or a reaffirmation. Joseph Long's analysis of the figures of subject and author in Samuel Beckett's prose proves to be no exception. Beckett's *Trilogy*, despite its radical undercutting of the conventions of realism, remains obsessively haunted by the problematics of authorship. Similarly, in *Company*, the impossible quest for an ultimate source of utterance itself asserts an irreducible presence of utterance, and, through that, of an 'uttering shade'. The image of a

founding or solidly founded subject has given way to that of a subject in infinite regression: not so much a void, as Foucault once implied, as a 'subject beyond seizure', as indelible as it is ghostly.

Since gaining favour among the surrealists, the *récit de rêve*, or dream-narrative, has become an important generic strand in what David Gascoigne calls the modern 'literary practice of subjectivity'. Taking the example of Georges Perec's *La Boutique obscure: 124 rêves* (1973), Gascoigne focuses on the author's need to control the reader's reception of his text. This yields, in addition to the waking and dreaming selves, a 'third' self, an 'intervening' self, who takes the form of a censoring but also ordering narrator within the dream. The strong framing effect in Perec's dream-writing of metaphors of theatre and cinema is attributed to this third self. Within the dream as theatre of the self, there is shown to be not just a constant inner drama between different personas, but a recurrent representation of the instability and ongoingness of self-realization, as found in both Paul Ricœur's theory of narrative identity and Lacan's 'decentred' subject. Echoing the figures of deferral and infinite regression invoked in earlier chapters, selfhood in Perec's dream-writing is that which 'remains to be inferred from a constantly shifting narrative production of the self'.

In a searching analysis of Marguerite Duras's *La Pluie d'été* (1990), Anne Chevalier questions whether this book can be read according to the standard image of the novel as a transposition of authorial self into fictional characters. For Duras, writing the self means inventing the self, not just as a personal or empirical construct, but, more archetypally, as the Writer-Poet. This autographical (as opposed to auto-bio-graphical) project is carried out through the invocation and intertextual appropriation of two exemplary figures: that of the Bible as supreme book, and that of Victor Hugo as supreme poet. The late Duras aims high, seeking to restore to reading and writing a sense of sacredness, of incommensurable value. What trace is left in all this of the auto-*bio*-graphical? Reminding us of Duras's statement, exactly one year before she died, not only that 'all is vanity and a striving after wind' but that 'I *am* this striving after wind', Chevalier concludes that the ultimate Durasian figure of the subject is one of nomadic movement and uncertain contour, a weaving of intertexts plotted by books and traced by writing. Yet, even here, there is seen to occur an attenuation of the process of attenuation in so far as this textual interweaving fuses the subject of writing, Marguerite Duras, with the empirical subject, Marguerite

Donnadieu, into a single identity, marked by the signature 'M. D.'.

Duras's interest in Hugo had a lot to do with his status as a political poet. Among contemporary writers, few have gone as far as Patrick Chamoiseau in exploring what it might mean or require to fulfil that role in the contemporary world. In her reading of Chamoiseau's *Texaco* (1992), Lorna Milne argues that, beyond his own particular cultural agenda, the Martinican writer's politico-ethical vision may usefully illuminate the sense of self in any culture. Contrary to some of his predecessors, Chamoiseau presents a 'strong' subject, capable of resistance and creativity. History, memory, awareness of the traces left by the past are shown to feed this confidence. Such a subject is not, however, rooted to the spot. On the contrary, there results from this rootedness a 'dynamic' subject whose identity is ongoing and relational: in constant interaction with its political, historical, and geographical environment, and with the diverse groups of others making up the human mosaic of that environment. Though Chamoiseau's subject is *attenuated* in relation to the solidities associated with the Cartesian view of a subject standing in glorious isolation over against the world, it can surely not be thought of as being in any way *tenuous*.

In the broad sweep of his analysis of one of the most influential of post-war French thinkers, Stephen Schwartz alerts us to tensions in Michel Foucault's approach to the question of the subject that are only partly defused by reference to the 'evolution' of his thought. According to Schwartz, Foucault throughout the 1970s was involved in reinstating the subject on practical and historical grounds while at the same time maintaining his critique of the subject on theoretical grounds; in the process he regularly ended up contradicting the basis of that critique. Not until his work in the 1980s, based on his turn to the philosophy of Ancient Greece, did Foucault come to 'synchronize' his theoretical and political stances, though even here he is said to have persisted in calling that work part of his 'critique of the subject' when, for Schwartz, it was in fact 'just the opposite'.

Whether propelled by tensions or by intentions, Foucault's gradual abandonment of the language of hard-line structuralist critique unquestionably confirmed, and indeed further fuelled, the whole phenomenon that has come to be known, however misleadingly, as the 'return' of the subject. One of the unexplored questions alluded to by Schwartz has to do with the shift in the late Foucault from the idiom of 'subject' to that of 'self'. It is perhaps fitting, then, that this question, now posed at a general

level, should constitute the underlying concern of Paul Gifford in both his own chapter and in his subsequent conclusion to the volume as a whole. In his wide-ranging chapter, Gifford begins by offering a careful summary of Ricœur's theory of selfhood as 'ipseity', which shares with the various strands of thought making up the 'return' of the subject a refusal of essentialist and foundationalist premises. Fastening onto the ethical dimension of *Soi-même comme un autre*, he concludes that Ricœur's key intuition lies in the idea 'that our empirical persona is simply not yet the ultimately recognizable *ipse* which it has the potential to become'. This in turn becomes the key idea used by Gifford to elicit Ricœurian resonances from a variety of literary texts. The radicalized Cartesianism of the early Valéry is shown to involve a 'pure self' that points through its own elusiveness to a state of selfhood 'more "real" than any realized actuality'. Taking a distinctly Christian form, the 'potential to become' bears fruit in Bernanos as both self-acceptance and self-transformation. Far more resistant to Ricœur's key intuition than either Valéry or Bernanos, Roland Barthes is seen finally to move towards ipse-recognition in his last book, *La Chambre claire*, where the figure of the Mother as generalized by sociological and psychoanalytical thought is rejected in favour of 'my mother' as singled out by the love of her son. Thus the refrain of *Soi-même comme un autre* resounds above all in the audibility of a process of self-actualization, nowhere more dramatic than in the move from an *idem*-view of the subject as 'nothing' to an *ipse*-vision of the subject as 'no-thing'.

How will the 'subject' fare in the first few decades of the twenty-first century? How much will it 'matter'? In what ways, and in what forms, is it likely to matter? As the ground currently lies in the build-up to the millennium (how long before the bubble bursts and we find ourselves in the 'post-millennial' era?), the forms it looks set to take are numerous. At the cool, futuristic end of the spectrum, they are likely to include modes of 'experimental individualism' offering a constant choice of provisional identities in the form of prosthetic 'self-extensions'.[36] At the hot end, they will more probably include theories of 'complex personhood' countering the reductivism of the old sociology by insisting on the complicatedness of all lives and lived experiences: a quality guaranteed in part by attributing to the past a capacity to indefinitely 'haunt' the

[36] See, for example, Celia Lury, *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1998).

present.[37] In the middle, against a background of continuing erosion of old certainties, the search for new ways in which to assert or protect various forms of meaningful identity, from the personal to the cultural and sociopolitical, will surely continue apace. Somewhere in the middle, too, propelled by a sense that, at certain key periods during the twentieth century, we were too willing to put ethical questions on the back-burner, the claims of 'self' and 'selfhood' are likely to continue to make themselves heard. And it is with a focus on this area of the spectrum in particular that Paul Gifford proposes, by way of conclusion, to round off the present volume.

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[37] See, for example, Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

DISGUISES OF THE NARRATING VOICE IN *DISCOURS DE LA METHODE*

A la mémoire de Gilbert Gadoffre,
et en souvenir du dernier Royaumont, juillet 1994.

It can be said that *Discours de la Méthode* begins and ends with dreams. Descartes's unitary vision of the way forward in scientific research began with a sequence of dreams in that heated hut near the German town of Ulm in the night of 10 November 1619; this is introduced in contracted form at the beginning of Part II of the *Discours*, but at the end of Part IV he turns to a refutation of dreams in favour of the evidence of reason. Part II is not, of course, the beginning of the *Discours*, and Part IV is not the end, but these two positions mark the chronological and conceptual poles of the work. As incompatible poles, expressions of the autobiographical and the philosophical subjects respectively, they are indicative of the conflicting moods, registers, and objectives of an author so apprehensive about his first book that he published it anonymously. The enduring impact of the strong, single-minded Cartesian subject stems from the 'cogito' and from the interpretation of *Discours de la Méthode* for nearly three centuries as a philosophical text. It is therefore important to remember the polyvalence of the text, serving at one and the same time as autobiography, philosophical reflection, preface to three scientific treatises entitled respectively *la Dioptrique*, *les Météores*, and *la Géométrie*, and as promotion of the scientific method adopted in those essays: consequently, and as Gilbert Gadoffre has conclusively shown, its full resonance cannot be appreciated until it is also admitted as a literary work.[1] Within the

[1] Gadoffre's position has been put in three indispensable studies: his introduction to his own edition of *Discours de la Méthode* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1941); 'Sur la chronologie du *Discours de la Méthode*', *Revue d'histoire de la*

context of the collective target of this book, the diversification of the subject which is made apparent by a literary approach can then be seen to be an illustration of the attenuated self, or of the subject which attenuates itself; this is made all the more interesting by the heavy contrast with the role model/model role of selfhood cast for Descartes in the same work.

But just how does the literary appreciation of *Discours de la Méthode* differ from the philosophical study? The literary interpretation pays more attention to the textual form of the work, and to the changing inflections of the narrating voice(s). In contrast, the philosophical reading has focused on the firm but apparently voiceless rationality of a carefully constructed method. The literary reading is probably more interested in the inspiration of dreams than the destruction of them, but far from seeking to debunk the immutable premises of what we know as Cartesianism (the *Robert* presents the synonyms of 'cartésien' as 'clair, logique, méthodique, rationnel, solide', to which we would also add 'determined and decisive'), this study will attempt to show how Descartes's 'coup d'essai' gains from an appreciation of the movement from epistemic to experiential subject. Such has been the philosophical commitment to the text as the source of an exemplary method (as distinct from the literary reading), particularly in France, that the notion of an amalgam of aims and voices continues to appear distasteful: even the recent attempt by Stephen Gaukroger to recast the work as entirely autobiographical shows the same refusal to admit inconsistency or contradiction in the Cartesian canon.[2] It is historical fact that, hostage to a number of conflicting pressures, such as the hostility of both Catholic Rome and the sceptical philosophers, fearful of the consequences for him of the Galileo trial in 1632, and vulnerable to the concerns of a fastidious first-time author, Descartes was anxious to

Philosophie et d'histoire générale de la civilisation, Jan. 1943, 45–70; 'Le *Discours de la Méthode* et l'histoire littéraire', *French Studies*, 2 (1948), 301–14. The pioneering work of Gadoffre has subsequently been supported in very accessible form by the books of Sylvie Romanowski, *L'Illusion chez Descartes: La Structure du discours cartésien*, coll. Critères (Paris: Klincksieck, 1974), and Dalia Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes*, coll. Cambridge Studies in French (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[2] Stephen Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), especially 'An Exercise in Autobiography, 1635–1636', pp. 304–09.

vindicate himself on several fronts at the same time. As Geneviève Rodis-Lewis put it: 'on ne saurait toutefois mettre sur ordinateur tous les "Je" et "Moi" du *Discours* comme ayant une même source' [you couldn't put together on computer every "I" and "Me" of the *Discours* as having the same origin].[3]

In a paradoxically 'Cartesian' way, the dreams that Descartes began with were carefully recorded in a manuscript document, known to successive editors as the *Olympica*. The third and last dream of the recorded sequence was inspired by a poem in Latin by the Gallo-Roman writer Ausonius (A.D. 310–c. 395). In the papers of Descartes rescued by Claude Clerselier (1614–1684), later copied by Tschirnhaus under the instructions of Leibniz (1646–1716), and incorporated in the biography of Descartes, *La Vie de Monsieur Descartes* (1691), by Adrien Baillet (1649–1706), we learn that the poem was 'Edyllium XV', an idyll from a section entitled *Ex Græco Pythagoricum de ambiguitate eligendae vitae* [*From the Greek according to the Pythagoricians, on the uncertainty of our choice of being*], to be found in the second volume of a seventeenth-century collection of Latin verse entitled *Corpus Omnium Veterum Poetarum Latinorum* [*The Complete Works of the Ancient Latin Poets*] (Lyon, 1603). The first line of the poem is: 'Quod vitæ sectabor iter?' [What path of life shall I follow?], and the last lines:

> Optima Graiorum sententia: quippe homini aiunt
> Non nasci esse bonum, natum aut cito morte potiri.[4]
>
> Also this thought of the Greeks is very wise: it would be, they say,/a boon for man not to be born, or to die as soon as he is born.

In a valuable commentary on this episode, Henri Gouhier suggests that the exploitation of Ausonius by Descartes in the manuscript presentation of his dream was a literary device entirely in keeping with the conventions of the day.[5] Regarding the same incident, there exists a handwritten note by Leibniz confirming that in material shown to

[3] Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, *Descartes: Textes et Débats*, coll. Livre de Poche (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1984), p. 106.

[4] The record of the dream sequence and the text of the poem are reproduced in *Œuvres de Descartes*, ed. by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, 12 vols (Paris: Léopold Cerf, 1908), X, pp. 180–85. Henceforth *AT*, with vol. no. and page references incorporated in the text.

[5] Henri Gouhier, *Les Premières Pensées de Descartes* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1979; 1st ed. 1958), p. 57 and *passim*.

him by Clerselier in 1675–76, he found in Descartes's own hand an unfinished dialogue in French between Epistemon and Polyandre, and a comedy in French that remained incomplete at the fourth act (*AT*, X 208). We therefore have circumstantial evidence to show that the *cogito*, the apparently non-humanist intuition that has served for so long to identify the originality of the subject in the *Discours*, was rooted in humanist literary concerns with self-expression, and also in the author's more personal introspection about his own future as an author.

If the intuition that lies at the core of *Discours de la Méthode* stems from a patently unscientific source, the actual form of the work also lacks a clear definition. In a letter to Mersenne of March 1636, Descartes expands on his publishing plans, mentioning that 'il y aura quatre traittés tous français, et le titre en général sera: *Le Projet d'une science universelle qui puisse élever nostre nature à son plus haut degré de perfection*' [There will be four treatises, all in French, and the general title will be *The Project of Universal Science which can Improve our Nature to its Highest Degree of Perfection*] (*AT*, I 338). A year later, in a letter of March 1637, four months before publication of *Discours de la Méthode*, Descartes bridles at the suggestion of the same correspondent that he should change his title: 'Mais ie n'ay sceu bien entendre ce que vous objectez touchant le titre: car ie ne mets pas *Traité de la Méthode*, mais *Discours de la Méthode*, ce qui est le même que *Preface ou Advis touchant la Méthode*, pour montrer que ie n'ay pas dessein de l'enseigner mais seulement d'en parler' [I did not know how to interpret your objections to my title for I am not calling it *Treatise on the Method*, but *Discourse on the Method*, which is the same thing as *Preface or an Opinion regarding the Method*, to show that I don't intend to deliver instruction on it but simply to talk about it] (*AT*, I 349). Mersenne's failure to understand that within the year Descartes had revised his initial title to embrace the more discursive form of an essay originated, of course, from Descartes's change of mind; even in Descartes's most intimate circle, therefore, the title and form of the work were surrounded by uncertainty.

To the problems of uncertain definition can be added Descartes's own astonishing admission of deliberate obfuscation; writing once more to his trusted confidant, the Minim priest Father Mersenne (4 April 1648; *AT*, V 142): 'Ma *Géométrie* est comme elle doit estre pour empescher que le Rob. et ses semblables n'en puissent médire

sans que cela tourne à leur confusion: car ils ne sont pas capables de l'entendre, et je l'ay composée tout à dessein en y omettant ce qui estoit plus facile' [My *Géométrie* is as it had to be in order to prevent le Rob. (Gilles Personne de Roberval, 1602–75, a rival mathematician) and his kind from saying unkind things about it without risk of embarrassment: because they are incapable of understanding it, and that's because I wrote it with that in mind, omitting the easy bits]. Given that the *Géométrie* was the last and most important of the three treatises of Descartes for which his *Discours* was presented as the prefatory explanation, what, one asks, could the real function of the *Discours* possibly have been if the major treatises it introduced were designed to be incomprehensible? Such deviousness should not come as too great a surprise to readers of Descartes's early papers; in the *Cogitationes privatae* of 1619, in a comment noted by Leibniz, he wrote 'larvatus prodeo — je m'avance masqué' [I progress under a mask] (*AT*, X 212).

The combination of literary preoccupations and disguise is never so complex in Descartes as in his use of Montaigne's *Essais*, first published some fifty years before *Discours de la Méthode*, with many editions continuing to appear throughout Descartes's lifetime. The borrowings of Descartes from Montaigne have been fully inventoried by Léon Brunschwig,[6] but the strategic applications of those borrowings have not been as fully treated. It is, of course, exquisitely ironic that the complex, allusive voice of the enemy of all dogmatism should serve as a model for the unequivocal Cartesian subject; it also reveals how, in his first-person narrative of *Discours de la Méthode*, Descartes nursed aspirations which went beyond objective, scientific reporting. It is clearly a question which deserves more consideration. Even the confident, affirmative opening sentence of *Discours de la Méthode* can be traced to Montaigne; perhaps it is confident and affirmative precisely because it comes from an illustrious precedent: 'Le bon sens est la chose du monde la mieux partagée, car chacun pense en être si bien pourvu, que ceux même qui sont les plus difficiles à contenter en toute autre chose, n'ont point coutume d'en désirer plus qu'ils n'en ont' [Good sense is the one thing most equitably distributed in the world, because everyone considers themself to be so well endowed

[6] Léon Brunschwig, *Descartes et Pascal lecteurs de Montaigne* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1945).

with it that even those who are most difficult to please in all other matters are not in the habit of looking for more of it]. Although not as provocative, because not an opening line, Montaigne's original version is the same in its ironic substance: 'le plus juste partage que la nature nous ait fait de ses grâces c'est celui du sens; car il n'est aucun qui ne se contente de ce qu'elle lui en a distribué' [the most equitable distribution that Nature has made of her gifts is the one of good sense; for there is nobody who is not happy with the share given to them].[7] Similarly, although philosophy has been cultivated for centuries by 'the best minds', it continues according to Descartes to contain 'de diverses opinions' [a diversity of opinions] without there ever being more than one that could be true, such that 'il ne s'y trouve encore aucune chose dont on ne dispute' [there is nothing in it that goes uncontested].[8] The same sentiments had already been expressed by Montaigne as follows: 'Je dis de mesme de la philosophie; elle a tant de visages et de variété, et a tant dict, que tous nos songes et resveries s'y trouvent. L'humaine phantaisie ne peut rien concevoir en bien et en mal qui n'y soit' [I have the same views about philosophy: it has so many different faces, and such variety, and has claimed so much, that it is the repository of all our dreams and musings. It is beyond human imagination to find anything of good or ill which is not represented in philosophy].[9]

As the opening sentence of the *Discours de la Méthode* echoes Montaigne, so too does one of the most famous closing passages of Part I: 'en me résolvant de ne chercher plus d'autre science que celle qui se pourrait trouver en moi-même, ou bien dans le grand livre du monde, j'employai le reste de ma jeunesse à voyager, à voir des cours et des armées, à fréquenter des gens de diverses humeurs et conditions' [in resolving to seek no more knowledge than I could find within me, or in the great book of the world, I spent the rest of my youth in travel, in the contemplation of courts and armies, and in meeting people of many diverse walks of life] (*DM* 55). Montaigne had earlier put the same idea in the following way: 'Ce grand monde,

[7] Michel de Montaigne, 'De la Præsumption', in *Essais*, ed. by Pierre Villey, 3rd edn, 2 vols, (Paris: PUF, 1978), II, pp. 631–62 (p. 656).

[8] René Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode*, ed. by Etienne Gilson (Paris: J. Vrin, 1970), p. 54. Henceforth *DM*, with page references incorporated in the text.

[9] Montaigne, 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond', in *Essais*, II, pp. 436–604 (p. 546).

que les uns multiplient encore comme espèces soubs un genre, c'est le mirouër [miroir] où il faut nous regarder pour nous connoistre de bon biais. Somme, je veux que ce soit le livre de mon escholier' [This great world, which is like a multiplication of so many varieties of a species, is the mirror in which we must look to know ourselves adequately. In a word, I want this to be the book of my young scholar].[10] 'These borrowings of Descartes from Montaigne are particularly remarkable for a number of reasons: (i) although expressed as the views of the first-person narrator, they are not acknowledged and so represent the borrowing of a voice: they are 'hypertexts' in a form of transposition which Genette calls 'transvocalisation';[11] (ii) the borrower is a younger man on the threshold of a career, but his source is a much older man looking back on the lessons of a lifetime completed; (iii) although the borrowed texts never acknowledge their source, the sheer concentration in Part I of borrowings, which in themselves are so particularly well-known and representative of Montaigne, indicates an unusual kind of subterfuge: ensuring by the scale and celebrity of his 'quotations' that his source will certainly be identified, he seeks not only an association with the great Montaigne, but one which looks more like a natural convergence of minds than a formal touching of the forelock. Is this a case of reassurance by association, or of ventriloquism?

It is in the chapter of *Discours de la Méthode* which draws most heavily upon the *Essais* that Descartes is the most manipulatively committed to the specific project of his subtitle, 'pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la vérité dans les sciences' [to direct the intelligence and to find absolute knowledge in the sciences]. Organized into the sequence of subjects studied in the Jesuit curriculum of La Flèche, expressing no anxiety and revealing no false starts, the account that Descartes offers of his schooldays follows a seamlessly linear path: it is, in fact, a false autobiography, designed to serve as a retrospective justification of the project already in place. The tactic of the autobiographical introduction is a skilful ploy; it serves as an eminently useful pre-emptive defence against any possible challenge to the premises of the project. What can be a more

[10] Montaigne, 'De l'Institution des enfants', in *Essais*, I, pp. 145–77 (p. 157).

[11] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La Littérature au deuxième degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), p. 237.

persuasive prologue than the writer's own experience? How can personal experience be denied? Although manipulating the reader here, the narrating voice is at its most falsely accommodating earlier in the text, disingenuously distancing itself from the notion of universal applicability of the method (which is, in fact, essential to its success): 'ainsi mon dessein n'est pas d'enseigner ici la méthode que chacun doit suivre pour bien conduire sa raison, mais seulement de faire voir en quelle sorte j'ai tâché de conduire la mienne' [so my purpose is not to instruct people in the method that they should follow in the direction of their intelligence, but simply to show how I tried to organize my own] (*DM* 48). As if seeking to confirm the more discursive literary mode suggested in the letter to Mersenne of March 1637, quoted above, he writes that he will propose his work only as a story or fable, adding: 'et tous me sauront gré de ma franchise' [and everyone will appreciate my candour] (*DM* 48). It is precisely with this non-candid claim to candour in Part I that Descartes launches into his false autobiography, thereby adding another voice to the text, that of the biographer. (Since a false autobiography is really only a biography, if not a fiction, its author should logically be called a biographer.) The biographer relates/invents a self in the past while the narrating first person appears to relate the present, working to reassure the reader with an apparent freedom of choice, and the voice of Montaigne lends a reassuring authenticity, and a touch of 'gravitas', to the informality of the tone — if not to the claims of candour. In other words, not only is the curricular autobiography of Chapter I a manipulative fiction, but the narrating voice of the present is deceitful in the choice it offers to the reader between universal applicability of the method on the one hand and the right to refuse on the other. In fact, the concession of freedom of choice apparently offered to the reader by the narrator is illusory because the biographer proceeds to fabricate through 'personal experience' an incontrovertible account of the past, a compulsory introduction to the method.

The (auto)biographical strand of *Discours de la Méthod*e (and thus the force of Descartes's demonstrations) is fortified by the periodic introduction of chronological references. Early examples occur at the end of Part I, when Descartes presents us with the unnaturally abrupt decision to withdraw from the great book of the world in order to 'étudier aussi en moi-même' [study also within myself] (*DM* 57), and at the beginning of Part II with explicit, if contracted, reference to the

events of 10 November 1619. From the evocation of this moment of concentrated reflection in his life (which fails to mention the dreams which he had earlier so exhaustively annotated), he develops a passage of powerful rhetorical (but not scientific) persuasion, exploiting the *topoi* of construction and architecture, to argue for the advantages of conceptual unity, which also comes to mean single authorship and the universality of his method. Here we find the Cartesian subject with all the assertiveness traditionally attributed to it. Drawing initial momentum from the biographical incident, the passage is given argumentative force by the repetition no less than six times of the demonstrative adverb *ainsi* [thus], giving voice to the Descartes we have come to expect: affirmative and decisive, thrusting forward to his target, which is, we assume, the exposition of the four principles of the method. Having completed his exposition and shown its validity for mathematical demonstration, the author allows himself the expression of complete satisfaction: 'ce qui me contentait le plus de cette méthode était que, par elle, j'étais assuré d'user en tout de ma raison' [what brought me the greatest contentment in this method was that I was confident of being able to use my own reason to the full] (*DM* 74). Q.E.D., one might say, but Descartes himself denies this fine assurance with the recurrent, contradictory, concessions of that 'other' narrative voice: 'Que si, mon ouvrage m'ayant assez plu, je vous en fais voir ici le modèle, ce n'est pas pour cela que je veuille conseiller à personne de l'imiter' [so if, relatively happy with my work, I now show you its basic principle, it is not necessarily because I wish to advise anyone to go the same way] (*DM* 64). Chronological reference is reintroduced at the end of Part II, once more 'confirming' the placement in real life, so to speak, of the abstract concepts under discussion. Just as the author announced at the end of Part I his withdrawal from the book of the world to begin a more studious, isolated existence, so he marks a progression from that in his determination at the end of Part II to reflect in more detail on the specific mode of enquiry he has discovered until he reaches 'an âge bien plus mûr que celui de vingt-trois ans [*recte* vingt-quatre], que j'avais alors [an age of much greater maturity than twenty-three (*recte* twenty-four) which I was then (in November 1619)]' (*DM* 75). But even here, this period of concentrated reflection, exploring the implications of the method, leading naturally to the founding principle of selfhood with the *cogito* and the metaphysics (Part IV), is

again interrupted, this time in Part III, by the concessions of Descartes's 'alter ego' on his moral responsibility.

There can be little doubt that there is a tightly linked progress intended from the principles of the method to their first absolute test in metaphysics, to which they were submitted in Part IV. As Descartes himself puts it: 'afin que je puisse juger si les fondements que j'ai pris sont assez fermes, je me trouve en quelque façon contraint d'en parler' [in order that I might determine whether my premises are solid enough, I find myself obliged, as it were, to broach the matter [of. metaphysics and the certainty of knowledge]] (*DM* 88). There is just as little doubt that the temporizing moral precepts of Part III interfere with that progress. It is at this stage that the reader discovers that, not only in terms of the narrating self or subject but of overall design of the work also, the powerful, archetypally 'Cartesian' drive towards firm evidence and conclusions of universal applicability is attenuated by a shadowing strategy of diffidence and caution. In the words of Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, 'il était à la fois d'un caractère aventurier et prompt à se replier' [he was of an adventurous temperament, but also prompt to retreat into himself].[12] Parts I, II, and IV of *Discours de la Méthode* expound the intellectual development and demonstration of the method in its pure and universal state, with recourse to the authorial devices we have noted, but in sharp contrast, Parts III, V, and VI betray the hesitation and uncertainty occasioned by disaster in the real world. The disaster, aggravated by the self-doubt of Descartes, was the necessity to revise his treatise entitled *Le Monde* as a consequence of the trial of Galileo in 1632. Despite occasional recourse to autobiographical recollection which is used to give him real presence, so to speak, the first-person narrator of the first series of chapters is a virtual and intellectual exemplar with pretensions to universal status, as the demonstrative *je* of the *cogito* demonstrates: in saying 'I think therefore I am', he is also speaking for the reader, 'You think therefore you are'. By contrast, in the second series of chapters, Parts III, V, VI, the first-person narrator assumes a real identity to contemplate his own past work. We shall see that between what we have called the first series of chapters (I, II, and IV) and the second

[12] Quoted in the title of an interview with her by François Ewald, *Magazine littéraire*, April 1996, 20–26 (p. 20); the interview was occasioned by the publication of Rodis-Lewis's biography, *Descartes: Biographie* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1995).

(III, V, and VI), demonstrative biography becomes introspective autobiography, and narrator and biographer exchange roles; biography is transformed, being no longer an instrument for decisive forward progress, but an alternative goal in itself.

The inner contradictions and changes of direction in *Discours de la Methode* have been highlighted by Gadoffre's chronology of composition,[13] (1943), summarized below:

PROPOSED DATES OF COMPOSITION OF *DISCOURS DE LA METHODE* (FROM GADOFFRE, 1943)

Chapter	*Date of modification/composition*
Part I	July–September 1636
Part II	Winter 1636–37
Part III	Last two paragraphs, Autumn, 1636; remainder, 1636–37
Part IV	February–July 1636
Part V	February–July 1636
Part VI	Winter 1635–36
Date of publication	8 June 1637

Without wishing to comment at this point on the specific dates proposed by Gadoffre, it can be seen how his pioneering textual chronology opens the way to investigation of the evasive subject within *Discours de la Méthode*. It is not so much the dates themselves that are of interest here as the identity and function of the subject. The loss of momentum, to the point of creating a sense of interruption, has been observed in Part III; this is expressed by an apparent aimlessness in the autobiographical strand: 'et toutes les neuf années suivantes je ne fis autre chose que rouler ça et là dans le monde' [and for all the following nine years, I did nothing but wander here and there in the world] (*DM* 84), or: 'ces neuf ans s'écoulèrent avant que j'eusse encore pris aucun parti' [those nine years elapsed without my committing myself to a decision] (*DM* 86). It is not, however, aimlessness so much as a fear of over-exposure which accounts for the near-contradictory insertion of Part III between Parts II and IV.

In its concern for the risks of exposure to the real world, Part III is at least related to the authorial present, but in Parts V and VI forward momentum is completely arrested by contemplation of the past which

[13] Gadoffre, 'Sur la chronologie du discours de la Méthode', art. cit. (note 1).

is prefaced thus: 'mais pour ce que j'ai tâché d'en expliquer les principales [vérités] dans un traité que quelques considérations m'empêchent de publier, je ne les saurais mieux faire connaître qu'en disant ici sommairement ce qu'il contient' [but since I attempted to explain the principal ones (truths) in a treatise that certain considerations prevented me from publishing, I could not do better than to summarize here what it contained] (*DM* 103). In this contemplation of a work which predates his *Discours* of 1637, and which was not supposed to exist, Descartes succeeds by a process of supererogation in reviving the contents of the lost piece. In other words, the treatise *Le Monde*, which he had earlier decided not to publish in deference to the judgment on Galileo, does in fact come into a vicarious or virtual existence in the pages of *Discours de la Méthode*. It is here, in the self-attenuating but persistent voice of the past, that we find a lesser-known Cartesian subject. The later chapters of the *Discours* are dominated by it, with their tenses changing from the imperfect and present of the opening chapters to retrospective past historic, pluperfect, and sometimes conditional, tenses. In the place of the earlier justification of method, and in his anxiety to relate as much of the past work as possible, Descartes also allows himself to make rapid, paraphrasing, and therefore incomplete, summaries, such as: 'je ne connais rien au monde que le feu qui produise de la lumière, je m'étudiai à faire entendre bien clairement tout ce qui appartient à sa nature, comment il se fait, comment il se nourrit, comment il n'a quelquefois que de la chaleur sans lumière, et quelquefois que de la lumière sans chaleur' [I know of absolutely nothing in the world but fire which can create light, (so) I worked at a clear demonstration of its properties, how it is created, how sustained, how sometimes it delivers only heat without light, and sometimes only light without heat] (*DM* 106); in this particular passage, in the same rigid inventory, three more aspects of study follow, all preceded by the same adverb (*comment*: 'how'). The summary evocation of earlier unpublished work creates other inventories, expressed in the pluperfect: 'J'avais expliqué [...]. Et ensuite j'avais montré [...]. Et je m'étais ici particulièrement arrêté à faire voir que [...].' [I had explained [...]. And I had shown [...]. And I had paid quite particular attention to [...]] (*DM* 119–120). And so it can be seen that, in a new stylistic pattern, Descartes re-writes himself by means of reported speech. This is a different voice narrating a different subject.

Instead of suggesting that, lost in his evocation of his earlier work, Descartes loses momentum in the last two chapters of *Discours de la Méthode*, it might be more helpful to point out that the new narrative voice of Parts V and VI builds up the subject with the pride, regret, and nostalgia of an earlier experience. Dalia Judovitz strikes an appropriate note when she comments that 'the rhetorical space of that masked absence will encourage the hermeneutical illusion of personality, of hidden intentions and individuality',[14] but this does beg the question as to whether the 'illusion of personality' is everywhere consistent and continuous, whether it is as artificial in the later chapters of *Discours de la Méthode* as it has been shown to be in the earlier ones. The long account of the action of the heart (*DM* 109–19) suggests that the impression of naïveté and failure in Part V is due more to the content than to the authorial perspective; taking the heart to be a heating system rather than a pump, and consequently confusing diastole with systole, Descartes proudly evokes work in the biological sciences which was catastrophically wrong. As is indicated by the title later given to Part VI, 'Quelles raisons l'ont fait écrire' [Why it was written], the final chapter avoids this kind of substantive error by focusing on the narrator's real presence and motivation. The conflation in Part VI of Descartes's past project with the present is confirmed by the ambiguity of the title, concerned as much with the reasons for not publishing *Le Monde* as with the reasons for publishing *Discours de la Méthode*. Self-effacement is identified with the attenuated voice: 'je n'ai jamais fait beaucoup d'état des choses qui venaient de mon esprit' [I never set much store by the product of my own mind] (*DM* 127). But, yet again, these revelations are masked by assertive observations such as: 'Et je pense pouvoir dire, sans vanité, que s'il y a quelqu'un qui en soit capable, ce doit être plutôt moi qu'aucun autre' [And I think I can say in all modesty, that if there is anyone who is capable of this (adding to the body of Descartes's work) it would more obviously be me than anyone else] (*DM* 136). The contrast between the narrative voice of this final chapter and that of the earlier ones is highlighted by the nature of the different kinds of doubt they express; the hyperbolic doubt of Part IV, introduced at an opportune stage of argument, appears to be positively assertive when compared with the real doubt, the personal

[14] Dalia Judovitz, op. cit. (note 1), p. 37.

self-doubt, and the hesitation which are exposed in the final explanation of the reasons for publishing *Discours de la Méthode*. Similarly, the treatment of dreams, alluded to at the start of this study, is confined to the opening series of chapters, to be replaced in the final chapters by a closer identification with the past.

In appearing to journey towards a time past in an exercise of retrieval, the narrative voice of Parts V and VI clearly differs from that of Parts I, II, and IV; from being an adjunct or even a decoy, biography and contemplation of the past become an integral part of the voice. This shift in focus appears to match what we know about the sequence of composition. It is therefore only in one minor respect that the stylistic scrutiny of *Discours de la Méthode* differs from the conclusions of Gadoffre's pioneering chronology of composition. As a dynamic natural conclusion to the forceful presentation of the method, the metaphysics of Part IV is substantially different from the introspective, retrospective, incorporation of past work undertaken by Descartes in Part V, and yet, according to Gadoffre, both pieces of work date from the same period. This is not necessarily a contradiction — different strategies can coexist without being separated in time. More interestingly, in showing that the later chapters of the *Discours* were chronologically the earliest, Gadoffre helps us to understand how the real autobiographical subject survives at the end of the book as a plaintive coda to the creation of a dynamic ego in the earlier pages. The work may have been planned this way, but it may also have been the consequence of a coincidence in the rearrangement of different manuscript forms. And this raises a veritable *mise en abyme* of questions about the gestation of the text, the authorial selection of manuscript passages, and the relationship of these two exercises to each other. Was, for example, the gestation of the opening pages conditioned by what Descartes knew to exist in manuscript form and had already decided to use as a redemption of his original project? Far from the infallible *Übermensch* of the mind, so frequently purveyed by the cultural stereotype scrutinized by Glucksmann and Azouvi,[15] we discover in Descartes a writer who is hostage to accident, vulnerable to the same triumphs and temptations

[15] André Glucksmann, *Descartes, c'est la France* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987); François Azouvi, 'Descartes', in 'Identifications', *Les Lieux de mémoire*, ed. by Pierre Nora, 3 vols, III, *Les France: De l'Archive à l'Emblème* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), pp. 734–83.

as anyone else of his craft, and all the more interesting for that. It was undoubtedly the distorting rigidity of the stereotype which enticed the inquisitive Gadoffre into his investigation in the first place, but it is also thanks to him that we can adjust the massive distortion of the Cartesian subject. Instead of bright, hard certainty, we find a writer who, while seeking a positive conclusion in the future for his work, brings us into the limbo of personal disappointment and hope; who, while boldly asserting the potency of self-sufficient reason, leans on the towering sensual humanism of Montaigne. Finally, like Montaigne himself, he leaves us wondering whether the exposure of his failings is not written with tongue in cheek. The subject certainly exists, but as something more elusive and complex than originally defined in the self-founding *cogito*.

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ROUSSEAU'S *CONFESSIONS*: MODES OF ENGAGEMENT WITH THE OTHER

Avois je quelque vrai talent pour ecrire? Je ne sais[1]

Rousseau, as is well known, first outlined some of the themes and phrases of the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* on a set of playing cards. A fragment of one of these reads as follows:

> ...mouvement continu que j'aperçois m'avertit que j'existe car il est certain que la seule affection que j'éprouve alors est la faible sensation d'un bruit léger égal et monotone. De quoi est-ce donc que je jouis de moi ou...[2]
>
> ...continuous movement that I perceive alerts me to my existence for it is certain that the only impression I experience then is the slight sensation of a light steady monotonous sound. Where then does my pleasure come from, from myself or...

The passage suggests a being at the threshold of self-awareness, evoking a pleasure in existence so simple that it can barely be articulated. The incompleteness of Rousseau's jotting adds to the impact: to the modern reader, this evocation of an inner life at once intense and fragile seems to capture something essential about the author and to confirm a widely-shared conception of Rousseau's writing about the self.

One might contrast it with the beginning of the much earlier *Ebauches des Confessions*. The project is sketched out in terms of a general moral problem. There is nothing of the evocative inward turn of the playing card:

[1] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Letters to Malesherbes (letter of 12 January 1762) in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by M. Raymond and B. Gagnebin (Paris: Gallimard, 1959–95), I, p. 1136. Except where otherwise indicated, subsequent references in the autobiographical writings will be to this edition and volume. All translations from the French are my own.

[2] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, ed. by Henri Roddier (Paris: Garnier, 1960), Introduction, card no. 3, p. l.

> J'ai remarqué souvent que, même parmi ceux qui se piquent le plus de connoitre les hommes, chacun ne connoit guéres que soi, s'il est vrai même que quelqu'un se connoisse; car comment bien déterminer un être par les seuls rapports qui sont en lui-même, et sans le comparer avec rien? (1148)
>
> I have often observed that, even among those who most pride themselves on knowing mankind, each person scarcely knows anyone but himself, if indeed it is true that anyone knows even himself; for how is one to determine a being simply by the relations within himself and without comparing him to anything?

Learning to know oneself requires comparison with other men, and such comparison has rarely or never been undertaken. The task of seeking self-knowledge is therefore apparently blocked: as Rousseau goes on to say, none of the reference points needed for such reflection actually exist. He will therefore offer a service to his fellows that will allow the injunction to 'know thyself' to be fulfilled as was never before possible. Indeed, Rousseau suggests a universal concern: in the end, the object is to know not just oneself but 'les hommes', humankind in general. This is to be an autobiography; however, it appears to have goals that lie far beyond the confines of the author's life and personality. Such an account of the new work aligns it with the moral and social preoccupations of the two Discourses and the *Emile*.[3]

The two passages have of course been chosen to mark a contrast: it would be easy to choose other passages that would suggest greater continuity between the *Confessions* and the *Rêveries* — reflections on method in the latter work, recollections of the dream world from the former. At the same time, the quotations correspond to distinct tendencies, acknowledged by the author himself. Rousseau excludes the other, at least overtly, from the later work, claiming to write only about himself and only for himself: 'Je n'écris mes rêveries que pour moi' [I write my reveries for myself alone] (1001). Indeed, the first *promenade* of the *Rêveries* makes it clear that this is the essential difference between what he calls 'mes premiéres Confessions' [my first Confessions] (1001) and the new work. Yet for the reader the

[3] The point is well made in a fine recent work on the *Confessions*, Jean-François Perrin, *Le Chant de l'origine: la mémoire et le temps dans les* Confessions *de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (*Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 339). Perrin emphasizes the anthropological impact of the work at a number of points in his study.

lyrical and evocative power of some celebrated passages from the *Rêveries* seems to bounce back against the *Confessions,* creating a confusing echo. That is perhaps why little value has often been accorded to a thread running through the earlier work suggesting that exploration of the self is a means leading towards a different end, and that the other is inscribed from the beginning in a project with important pedagogical and moral dimensions. Rousseau's purpose, as declared in the *Ebauches,* is to facilitate others in the quest for self-knowledge, by providing them with intimate knowledge of one other person, 'et cet autre ce sera moi' [and this other will be myself] (1149). This account of the *Confessions* as 'un ouvrage unique et utile' [a unique and useful work] (3) for readers undertaking the study of man will be echoed in the preamble to the work and throughout its length.

The essay that follows will be first of all a reflection on this declared mode of presence of the other in the *Confessions.* Is it consistently relevant, does it genuinely inform the work? The attempt to answer these questions will lead on to a consideration of other modes of relation with the reader. Finally, why does Rousseau move so overtly to a purely private reflection in the *Rêveries*? The reasons may be to do with his personal circumstances, even with mental disturbance, as is often suggested. Could they however also be related to the experience of composing the earlier work, to difficulties or tensions inherent in the plan of the *Confessions*?

First of all, then, in the *Ebauches* and again at the beginning of the *Confessions,* Rousseau claims to write for others in the sense that he wishes to provide them with a 'piéce de comparaison' [term of comparison] (3) enabling them to understand themselves better. At the simplest level, therefore, in so far as this object shapes the work, he is not writing for himself but for his readers. Almost everything in the text can in fact be linked to this version or aspect of his undertaking: if the reader is to have the best possible 'piéce de comparaison', then all information is relevant, whether it be a conventional item like the details of Rousseau's birth and parentage (6), or the shameful story of his abandonment of his own children many years later (Book VIII). As a consequence, it is probably impossible to say that any substantial passage of the work can be justified only by reference to the author, unless Rousseau's overtly-declared purposes are to be ignored. This public concern of Rousseau as autobiographer was not often

acknowledged by modern critics until the American political scientist Christopher Kelly brought it into focus in an important study published in 1987.[4] Kelly takes Rousseau's own account of his project seriously and suggests that this is an exemplary life, written for the instruction of others, and genuinely comparable (despite the first-person narrative) to Plutarch's lives. Kelly administered a remarkable and salutary lesson, realigning the *Confessions* with the ideological works and gently easing the preromantic Rousseau into the background, to be replaced by a less familiar but equally significant figure who was a passionate admirer of the Ancients. Only the title (one might add) fails completely to encompass this aspect of the work: confession implies impassive and perhaps superior listeners (Augustine addressed himself to God), concerned for the moral situation of the speaker rather than their own illumination or improvement.

The *Confessions* is a peculiarly complex work, composed over a long period and marked by Rousseau's changing personal situation. That needs to be remembered in any critical account. If one recalls that the last page of Part I rules out writing the continuation that in fact awaits the reader who turns over the page, whereas the end of Part II announces a third part — 'si j'ai la force de l'écrire' [if I have the strength to write it] (656) — that never came into existence, one begins to get the measure of the text: it is coherent in conception and subject-matter (in so far as it recounts a single life), but not necessarily at the level of detailed planning or execution, still less in tone and in mode of address to the reader. Rousseau himself readily acknow-ledges a marked difference in quality between the two parts of the work, separated from each other by a gap of two years: except in two respects which are specified, the second part will be 'inférieure en tout' [inferior in every way] to the first (279). There are many eloquent, touching and amusing passages in Books VII to XII, which are more varied and more lyrical than Rousseau's initial comments on them would lead the reader to believe, but signs of haste are often apparent, and the individual books are noticeably less well crafted than those of Part One. Above all, his enemies' machinations become a recurrent theme.

[4] Christopher Kelly, *Rousseau's Exemplary Life: The Confessions as Political Philosophy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987).

If Rousseau is increasingly caught up in a struggle against external enemies or personal demons, do these concerns in the end evict larger moral considerations from the text? The question is not easy to answer clearly, since a change in goal will not necessarily be fully reflected in a change of method: the narrative of his own life can serve several different objectives. Even in the first part, the larger moral goal is often present only by implication or allusion. In the well-known passage that closes Book IV, for example, where the author writes: 'Je voudrois pouvoir en quelque façon rendre mon ame transparente aux yeux du lecteur, et pour cela je cherche à la lui montrer sous tous les points de vue, à l'éclairer par tous les jours' [I should like to be able in some way to make my soul transparent to the reader's gaze, and to that end I am attempting to show it to him from every point of view, to illuminate it in every possible light] (175), no specific reference is made to the quest for self-knowledge. However, the readers of the *Confessions* are depicted engaged in a complex, quasi-scientific task. They may even become bored, Rousseau suggests, but it does not follow that he will be 'mécontent de mon travail' [dissatisfied with my work] (175). No explicit reasons are given for these various feelings, but the author's ideal reader is clearly in search of illumination rather than pleasure. In the hasty final paragraph of Book VI, there is an echo of Book IV when Rousseau writes, referring to his youth: 'J'en ai narré l'histoire avec une fidélité dont mon cœur est content' [I have recounted the story with a fidelity that contents my heart]. The comment faces both ways, inwards and outwards, suggesting a concern for the truth that derives from a moral imperative proper to the author, but that also underpins the value of the work as an 'ouvrage unique et utile'.

The opening pages of Book VII offer a vivid impression of the new tone that will characterize Part Two. Rousseau is writing because he is forced to ('forcé de parler malgré moi' [forced to speak in spite of myself], 279: it is clear from other writings that Rousseau believed his every action, including writing, to be somehow under the control of his enemies). There are spies everywhere, the walls have ears, and he is scarcely able to throw a few hasty words onto paper. Here we are given a quite explicit purpose for his enterprise: 'l'on craint toujours que la vérité ne s'échappe par quelque fissure. Comment m'y prendre pour la faire percer? Je le tente avec peu d'espoir de succés' [they still fear that truth will escape through some crack. How can I

set about getting it out? I am attempting it with little hope of success] (279). Success is to be measured differently now, it would seem: the problem is not one of faithful portrayal as such but of achieving contact with the public, of making known the truth through combat against redoubtable enemies who are fearful of it. The question of boredom for the reader recurs, but here the reason why he or she might nevertheless persist becomes explicit: it can only be 'le desir d'achever de connoitre un homme, et l'amour sincére de la justice et de la vérité' [the wish to get to know a man fully, and a sincere love for justice and truth] (279). The issue of self-knowledge for the reader appears to have been largely superseded by the question of justice for Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

The tone of this second volume is however far from uniform. Many passages are calmer and more judicious. For example, when Rousseau narrates in Book X his decision to write his memoirs, he observes: 'je résolus d'en faire un ouvrage unique par une véracité sans exemple, afin qu'au moins une fois on put voir un homme tel qu'il étoit en dedans' [I resolved to make the work unique by unprecedented veracity, so that at least once a man could be seen as he was within] (516). Nothing indicates what exactly is the finality of the unique example Rousseau proposed to give, but there must be once more an implicit reference to the moral illumination of the reader. This is a relatively serene passage where, even if Rousseau speaks of his deformed public image, there is no mention of any plot.

Critics generally link the project of writing the *Confessions* to the upheavals that Rousseau undergoes from the time of his personal reform onwards, and especially to the condemnation of the *Emile* by civil and religious authorities in 1762. The storm of persecution that broke about his head at that point caught him unprepared and left him bewildered. The publication of Voltaire's *Le Sentiment des citoyens* (1764), which revealed that Rousseau had abandoned his children, was a further blow.[5] Rather than repeating the arguments of his major ideological works (the two Discourses and the *Emile)* he chooses to tell the story of the man who elaborated them. Something has not been heard, and the something is perhaps the author's *voice.* He will therefore describe or show who was speaking in the works that

[5] This pamphlet is referred to in the *Ebauches* (Rousseau, however, wrongly believed it to be by the Genevan pastor Vernes).

were condemned. That is to be sufficient proof that these works, and the *Emile* in particular, cannot be the productions of the godless wretch depicted by his enemies.

As I suggest above, this concern is not incompatible with the project of moral illumination that Rousseau also lays claim to. Whether the reader is to be Rousseau's judge, or whether he is assumed to be in search of enlightenment for himself, he requires a full and faithful account of the author. At another level, however, the two modes of relation to the reader are sharply opposed. If the reader is in search of personal illumination, then Rousseau is offering him a gift, and, as he insists, a rare and precious one. However, if Rousseau is in search of judgment and absolution, then he is asking something from the reader. Asking tends to be expressed in more overt forms than giving: that is perhaps why the appeal for judgment seems much more insistently present in the logic and the rhetoric of the work. In the form finally taken by the *Confessions*, there is in fact no escape from this demand, since the opening passage evoking the Last Judgment, a passage written relatively late,[6] and close in tone to the more extreme elements of Part Two, sets up from the outset a scenario that will recur in other forms throughout. The final judgment on Rousseau is to be passed in the presence of God by his fellow-humans, who are dared to come forward after listening to his story and to say: 'je fus meilleur que cet homme-là' [I was better than that man] (5): self-knowledge seems to survive only as a preliminary to self-judgment, and comparison exists only as a preliminary to exculpating Rousseau.

The reader is therefore everywhere present in the *Confessions*, both as a pupil finding the path to self-knowledge through the encounter with Rousseau, and as a judge whose task is ultimately to return a verdict of innocence on a man persistently and wrongly found guilty. However, there is a third dimension to the presence of the other in the work, not directly implicating the reader: this is the story of a life lived among men and women, a life shaped and reshaped by successive encounters that make a destiny out of the accidental and the haphazard. The *Confessions* contains a huge cast of characters: Jacques Voisine devotes 250 pages of his edition to biographical

[6] Perhaps in 1768: see notes by Raymond and Gagnebin in *Œuvres complètes*, I.

notes on all those who are encountered therein.[7] Some are spear-carriers and extras of various kinds, making only a fleeting appearance. Some are significant presences in Rousseau's life, despite receiving only brief mention: his Tante Suzon, for example, who sang to him and partly reared him. Some are the might-have-beens: La Merceret, whom he could have married, would have given him a modest but secure life in Fribourg; the fake Archimandrite whom he encountered near Neuchâtel would have taken him off to Jerusalem (perhaps), if he had not been unmasked and disgraced at an early stage of the journey. Some are lifelong friends and correspondents, like Daniel Roguin. A few are vital influences who have shaped the direction of his life, the evolution of his ideas, the nature of his feelings: Mme de Warens (and perhaps her rival, Venture de Villeneuve), Diderot, possibly Thérèse Levasseur.

Rousseau chooses to tell us his life-story in a chronological narrative that begins with his birth, that ends with his departure from the Ile St Pierre in Bienne, and that might have continued with an account of his stay in England. The decision to write such a narrative (rather than a self-portrait, for example) is in one sense perfectly coherent. It has two main aspects. Firstly, the story of the author's life becomes the guarantee of the moral quality of his work: the story of what he had done ('le détail des événemens de sa vie' [the details of the events of his life] (1148), as the heading of the *Ebauches* puts it) is to reassure the reader as to the integrity of what he has written. The second aspect of the decision is that it is in conformity with the wider choice of writing over social intercourse, summed up by Rousseau as 'le parti que j'ai pris d'écrire et de me cacher' [the decision I took to write and to hide] (116). The passage in the *Confessions* devoted to this choice is well known: Rousseau is a 'bear' in society, sure at every turn to say the wrong thing, or alternatively to maintain a gauche silence while conversation crackles around him.[8] His intelligence has regularly been misjudged since the time when a relative of Mme de Warens reckoned he might just make a country priest.

These, then, are three important dimensions of the relationship with

[7] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions*, ed. by Jacques Voisine (Paris: Garnier, 1980).

[8] See the commentary by Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l'obstacle* (Paris: Gallimard, second edition, 1970), p. 149 ff.

the other. The *Confessions* have a moral purpose, enabling the reader to encounter, in all the truth of his nature, another human being, and so to progress towards self-knowledge. They have an apologetic purpose, enabling Rousseau to situate his ideas in relation to his personal experience in a way that he hopes will win over those who have somehow failed to recognize the voice of truth in his ideological writings. They are also part of the larger choice of 'writing and hiding', and a significant part of it if one is to judge by the passage concerned: the problems described concern primarily the presentation of the self in society rather than the persuasive exposure of ideas, and to that extent the *Confessions*, the work in which this choice is acknowledged, is perhaps also the work in which the choice of writing can be most effective.

Why then is the work in certain ways a failure? The term may surprise in relation to one of the most celebrated autobiographies ever written, but it is surely close to Rousseau's own judgment. The text closes on the fierce and despairing pronouncement already referred to: anyone who, in his encounter with Rousseau, fails to recognize the man's moral qualities is 'un homme à étouffer' [a man to be stifled]. Although the expression was used regularly and somewhat casually in the eighteenth century, the denunciation remains striking. It could be said to open up what it seeks to shut down: if such a passionate warning is necessary, then a negative judgment of the author is still possible at the end of a work devoted to eliminating just that danger. Indeed, instead of writing the third part already referred to, Rousseau will go on to write an involved and confusing set of texts, the *Dialogues*, which are essentially a reflection on precisely this problem of encounter: what does it mean to meet another human, and how does that meeting relate to the encounter that takes place through the written word?

External factors unquestionably affect Rousseau's perception of his own situation as rendered in the *Confessions* and later. His flight from France after the *Emile* was published left his life unsettled for years, with many moral and emotional consequences. Some of his beliefs about his own situation and destiny at the end of the 1760s are quite irrational.[9] What is to explain this tragic clouding of Rousseau's mind,

[9] As, for example, his conviction that he had been secretly tried and convicted for a grave crime, the nature of which was hidden from him. This delusion persisted over many years.

a clouding that never really lifts (the *Dialogues* and the *Rêveries* are in my view in part a highly intelligent man's adaptation to his own extreme mental distress, which he cannot overcome)? The actual persecution that Rousseau undergoes (the condemnation of the *Emile* and the warrant for his arrest) does not immediately provoke this reaction. His quarrel with Hume in 1766 seems to be the real turning point. A year afterwards, Rousseau left England in a state of acute mental turmoil, running away without notice from the house placed at his disposal in Staffordshire. When he reached Dover, violent storms prevented him from embarking for some days, during which he apparently harangued the inhabitants, a mad, prophetic figure.[10] Solitude in Staffordshire, where French speakers were few, difficulties between his companion Thérèse and their domestic staff: such are the immediate reasons commonly advanced for the catastrophic end to Rousseau's English sojourn.

Rousseau's activities in Staffordshire included walking and botanizing. However, the bulk of Part One of the *Confessions* was also composed there. I would like to advance at this point an unprovable hypothesis: that writing his autobiography may have contributed to Rousseau's distress and to the emergence of irrational beliefs and behaviour. The task seems to engage him with others as much as it allows him to return into himself, since he determines to offer a moral service to others through his writing and to invite others to sit in judgment on him. It also forces him to revisit the social arena, scene of all his misfortunes. The emblematic sentence that for me sums up a dilemma of the work is the very first of the autobiographical narrative proper: 'Je suis né à Genève en 1712 d'Isaac Rousseau Citoyen et de Susanne Bernard Citoyenne' [I was born in Geneva in 1712 of Citizens Isaac Rousseau and Susanne Bernard]. The advantages that the author attributed to writing over ordinary social exchange have already been outlined. In a sense, however, the mode of writing about the self that he chooses remains close to the social: autobiographical narrative (as opposed to a synthetic self-portrait, for example — or a reverie) is inevitably about the self in relation to others, about encounter and exchange. In the sentence quoted, Rousseau is situated in a place, is linked to a date, is designated as the child of parents

[10] See *Correspondance complète*, vol. 33, Appendice 536, for an account said to have been given by Rousseau himself.

whose name and status are given. All of these items are closely related to the narrator, but ultimately they set him in an environment, and to a great extent that is the pattern of the whole work: Rousseau's life is retold, set in its human and physical surroundings. The question is whether the differences between having the experience and telling the story are sufficient to protect the author from undergoing something like a repetition of a long chain of events in which he had the impression of showing himself as 'tout autre que je ne suis' [quite other than I am] (116). The gift of the *Confessions* to the reader in search of self-knowledge, the judgment and absolution sought from him or her: these too have a meaning only if Rousseau can show himself as he really is.

What are the arguments for saying that the differences are sufficient? Rousseau himself outlines them in the passage on writing and hiding, where he recalls the horrors that conversation holds for him. In conversation spontaneity is required, and for Rousseau spontaneity usually takes the form of some calamitously inappropriate remark, the import of which he seizes only after the fact. Writing is thus a mode of self-presentation that eliminates some of the grosser risks that exchange with others carries. It allows for elaboration and revision: some sentences in the *Confessions* may be among those that were turned and re-turned over five or six sleepless nights, as was sometimes Rousseau's practice, before being committed to paper (114).

Another related difference is perhaps even more important. Rousseau has a whole variety of terms that he uses to refer to his inner life: 'mon intérieur' is one that recurs frequently. Clearly, one of the principles organizing the work is that of an opposition between inner and outer. At the beginning of Book VII, to return to that crucial passage, Rousseau, speaking of his lack of papers to refer to, has a superb sentence to describe how he will work in their absence:

> Je n'ai qu'un guide fidelle sur lequel je puisse compter; c'est la chaîne des sentimens qui ont marqué la succession de mon être, et par eux celle des évenemens qui en ont été la cause ou l'effet. (278)
>
> I have only one faithful guide that I can count on: the chain of the feelings that have marked the succession of my being, and through them that of the events that were their cause or effect.

A little further on, another sentence confirms the primary importance of feeling:

> Je puis faire des omissions dans les faits, des transpositions, des erreurs de dates; mais je ne puis me tromper sur ce que j'ai senti, ni sur ce que mes sentimens m'ont fait faire; et voila de quoi principalement il s'agit.
>
> I may make omissions of fact, transpositions, errors in dates; but I cannot be mistaken about what I have felt, nor about what my feelings have caused me to do; and that is the principal matter.

Feeling is the locus of continuity in the work, the common element to which external events are related either in being provoked by it (cause) or in eliciting it in their turn (effect). Rousseau's concept of feeling has a marked chronological dimension.[11] It is not static, not constant in its order, but evolves in a dynamic relation with the external world, which the *Confessions* can render, with or without the support of documents. One might speculate that the movement of feeling is ultimately what dictates the choice of a chronological narrative. Feeling is vital, but feeling is a linked chain, a succession, that a static portrayal cannot render. And the difference between personal encounter and writing about the self is that feeling can be brought forward, can be given the role in narrative and commentary that it actually plays in Rousseau's life. Feeling is not necessarily or invariably accessible in social interchange: the vision of life that emerges from the written work must restore it to its true place, and give the reader access to what a social acquaintance can only perhaps guess at or apprehend in a fragmentary and distorted form.

What are the arguments on the other side, those suggesting that the differences between social exchange and writing are not enough to safeguard the latter from running onto the same shoals as the former? In linking his undertaking to the reader's quest for self-knowledge, the author gives a finality outside his own self to the work, but in a way that he does not appear to find alienating. However, the in-

[11] Compare *Confessions*, Book IV: 'Il y a une certaine succession d'affections et d'idées qui modifient celles qui les suivent et qu'il faut connoitre pour en bien juger' [there is a certain succession of impressions and ideas which modify those that follow them and which must be known in order to judge the latter rightly] (174–5). Here the vocabulary is slightly different: impressions and ideas are closer to the sensationist philosophy that Rousseau partly shared with such contemporaries as Condillac in the earlier part of his career and that in certain respects he never disavowed. 'Sentimens' is a term closely linked to the sense of being misunderstood and traduced: against the activities of his false and hateful enemies, Rousseau offers the vision of a man whose life is governed by his faithfulness to his own feelings.

creasingly insistent demand for judgment from the reader is more problematic. Rousseau is greatly concerned with reception, and the *Confessions* contains many narratives recounting the positive or negative response of others to a man who believes that he rarely shows himself as he really is. The beating of Rousseau and his cousin by his uncle for breaking a comb they had never touched (Book I) is one such episode: Rousseau is unjustly punished because he cannot make others believe that he is telling the truth. The story of the stolen ribbon (Book II) is another, with its unjust punishment of an innocent young girl because Rousseau successfully, inexplicably, lied. Indeed, these are two of the crucial cases: the underestimation of Rousseau's intellectual capacities by Mme de Warens's relative, or again by Mme Dupin, is embarrassing and frustrating, but the judgments that really matter are the moral ones.

The question then is: can the *Confessions* set up a relationship different enough from that of social exchange for surer judgments to be made? The set-piece confessions of the early books of the work leave one in doubt about this, since they seem to lead the narrative into a tangle from which there is no escape. The case of the stolen ribbon is exemplary. Conflicting purposes assigned to the account of this episode lead to the edge of contradiction, in a narrative that successively depicts Rousseau as diabolically wicked and as little more than a helpless child. The fundamental difficulty is not so much the opacity of social relations, where unconsidered gestures and thoughtless words can provoke harsh judgments, as that each person ultimately retains an absolute freedom of judgment in relation to each other person, whether in individual encounter or in reading. The *Confessions* can provide vast amounts of information about Rousseau, they can depict his feelings in an intimacy and detail that has no equivalent in the fragmentary exchanges of brief or casual social encounters, and they can do so in the most lucid or the most lyrical language, but they cannot compel the reader's assent. If Rousseau was in any doubt about that (and perhaps he was) there are now two hundred years of readings and commentaries to testify to a diversity of interpretations alarming to perhaps any autobiographer but particularly to one whose vision of his own work was so tightly defined.[12] In some respects the *Confessions* can only repeat the

[12] For a recent example of this diversity, see Paule Adamy, *Les Corps de Jean-Jacques*

dilemma of Rousseau's social life. It may be that only a monster will choose to retain the misleading appearances which a certain narrative logic leads the author to include in his work, and to discard the evocation of a good and free man towards which the whole work tends, but perhaps many men have become monsters. Or perhaps it is less frightening to conclude that many men have become monsters than to contemplate the possibility that a vast undertaking, consuming years of a man's life, could never attain the goals set for it. 'Je voudrois pouvoir en quelque maniére rendre mon ame transparente aux yeux du lecteur' [I should like to be able in some way to make my soul transparent to the reader's gaze] (175): the famous formula is more tentative than critics sometimes allow, but it corresponds to an ambition that shapes the work, through the focus on 'la chaîne des sentimens qui ont marqué la succession de mon être' [the chain of the feelings that have marked the succession of my being]. There is nothing Rousseau can do if a reader dismisses his account of his feelings as false or self-serving, or if he simply rejects the priority given to feeling and argues (as many readers, including eminent figures such as Jacques Maritain, have) that, broadly speaking, his deeds rather than his motives are what count.[13]

There are some accounts of real positive responses to Rousseau in the *Confessions*. He successfully seduces Mme de Larnage (even if only after vigorous prompting from her). He has known moments of eloquence that go some way towards compensating for all the memories of stammering incoherence, of helpless silence, of incongruous and misplaced interventions in conversation: he speaks well before the Berne Senate on behalf of his Archimandrite. When one looks at the models of positive response in the autobiographical narrative, however, it is striking that the most remarkable cases are those of two works of fiction, Rousseau's operatic intermezzo *Le Devin du village* and his novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. These are the works that have reduced the women of the court at Fontainebleau and of Paris to tears, and have allowed Rousseau to experience intense

Rousseau (Paris: Champion, 1997). The author's claim is that Rousseau was homosexual, and exclusively so. All elements of the *Confessions* that do not match this thesis are to be discarded. Rousseau had no children: this and everything else in the narrative that suggest heterosexual desire are fabricated to hide the truth.

[13] Jacques Maritain, *Trois Réformateurs: Luther, Descartes, Rousseau* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1925).

gratification, as much erotic as authorial: his account of the reception of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* includes the naïve boast that he could have had almost any woman he wanted after it first appeared (545).

In later life Rousseau increasingly relates the content of his work to his own emotions and imagination. Thus the model for the man of Nature in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* comes from his own heart, it appears in the *Dialogues*, although the *Confessions* had given quite a different account. The *Dialogues* themselves can well be seen as representing a retreat into imagination and desire, away from the multiple engagement with others that takes place in the *Confessions*. The dialogues do not address the reader, and everything that, with whatever anguish and difficulty, had been taken to be possible in the earlier work is put into question. No contemporary of Rousseau's will hear his authentic voice, unless it be the two interlocutors whose exchanges we read. In the *Rêveries,* the withdrawal from engagement with an audience has gone a stage further. One can debate the strict fidelity of the work to this claim, but Rousseau declares that he writes these pages only for himself, and further declares that his reputation is in the hands of his enemies, not only for his own time but for all future generations. He has no audience but himself, and no subject but his own inner life of dreams and meditations.

All this because of the plot: his enemies are everywhere and all-powerful. That is Rousseau's account. The reader, endowed with the alarming freedom that Rousseau tries to engage with in the *Confessions,* may however read exactly as he or she will, may even not believe that the plot existed (which of course is to become part of it). And then another account of the great work and its two successors looms on the horizon: Rousseau seeks a mode of encounter with the other that, in all its intensity, fails first in social experience, and then fails again in an autobiographical narrative, where the claims of the other are inscribed. But some mode of encounter must be salvaged: like desire (which is part of it) it is rescued by the retreat into the imagination. Hence the endless discussion in the *Dialogues* between 'le François' and 'Rousseau' ending with the decision to succour 'Jean Jaques' in his old age. Hence too the *Rêveries,* where Rousseau writes of the 'êtres imaginaires' [imaginary beings] (1081) with whom he spends his time, declaring: 'Ils dureront autant que mes malheurs mêmes' [they will endure as long as my misfortunes].

Rousseau cannot say that 'mes malheurs' lie in the endless possibilities possessed by others, readers as well as acquaintances, to misunderstand, to dissent, to disbelieve, to laugh at the wrong moment, even to declare 'Je fus meilleur que cet homme-là' [I was better than that man], but he cannot stop that same reader from making such a judgment at will. So the *Confessions* end in disorder and débâcle: the humane project of providing a necessary model for the moral illumination of humankind falls, along with the hope that the work will produce the belief in his innocence that Rousseau longs to see reaffirmed. The work seems to be the victim of its own engagement with the other, giving way in the *Dialogues* to convoluted debates about interpreting writing and recognizing virtue, about establishing any kind of valid relation with the other, and in the *Rêveries* to a life with imaginary creatures of whom Rousseau writes: 'Ils existent pour moi qui les ai créés et je ne crains ni qu'ils me trahissent ni qu'ils m'abandonnent' [they exist for me who created them and I have no fear that they will betray me or abandon me] (1081). In the *illumination de Vincennes*, which according to the *Confessions* revealed fundamental truths and set Rousseau on the road to writing his great ideological texts, he discovered 'un autre univers' [another universe] (351). All of Rousseau's works are connected to some version of this other universe, whether it be the Second Discourse, which describes a state 'qui n'a peut-être jamais existé' [which has perhaps never existed], the *Emile*, of which Rousseau writes: 'Ce devroit être l'histoire de mon espéce: vous qui la dépravez, c'est vous qui faites un roman de mon livre'[14] [this should the history of my kind: you who deprave mankind are the ones who make a novel out of my book], or the *Dialogues*, which describes 'un monde idéal semblable au nôtre, et neanmoins tout différent' [an ideal world similar to ours and nevertheless quite different] (668). The great exception is the *Confessions*, which engages with a world of event and personality that sets it apart from everything else Rousseau wrote. Perhaps his career should be ordered and interpreted in that way, not as falling into a period of ideological writing followed by a long engagement with autobiography, as is often said, but as a writing life devoted to dream and imagination in which only one work took a different path. In all its complexity and its diverse energies, the

[14] *Emile*, Book V, *Œuvres complètes*, IV, p. 777.

Confessions tells the story of Rousseau's public life up to the age of fifty; and in its shifting engagement with the reader it allows us to follow his evolution over the following ten years, during which the alarming image of the reader as being possibly 'un homme à étouffer' drives the author back into a world of desire and imagination, where, according to the *Dialogues*, a special sign binds speaker and listener, reader and writer together: 'il est vrai dès qu'il est senti' [it is true as soon as it is felt] (672). Historically, the *Confessions* enjoys an assured place in the emergence of the autobiographical genre. Within Rousseau's work, however, the text can seem fragile, tentative, exploratory. It is perhaps worth recalling, as I have tried to do here, that it was abandoned rather than concluded, and that in certain respects it is at odds with everything that went before or came after it.

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WRITING THE INNER CITADEL: THE THERAPEUTICS OF THE SOUL IN ROUSSEAU'S *REVERIES D'UN PROMENEUR SOLITAIRE*

Man, if you are anybody, go walking alone,
converse with yourself. (Epictetus)

Within Rousseau's autobiographical trilogy, critics have tended to stress the radical and original character of the enterprise of the *Confessions* by highlighting their author's claims to re-establish the truth about a self which he perceives or requires to be given and unchanging. The *Dialogues* and the *Rêveries,* on the other hand, are often seen to mark the failure and abandonment of such a project. The *Rêveries* have no external addressee, no founding exteriority: 'Je n'écris mes rêveries que pour moi' [I am writing my reveries for myself alone].[1] This work is read as a critique of autobiography and a break with the *Confessions*. Its author is said to be seeking to return to primitive existence, prior to reflection, morality and individuality;[2] to be finding his place as a 'dead man' within the fusional, subject-less space of mother nature;[3] or to be shaking off the intrusive Other in himself, reworking the frontiers of the subject by oscillating between

[1] *Rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire*, ed. by Henri Roddier (Paris: Dunod, Classiques Garnier, 1997), p. 11. English translations, adapted where appropriate, are from *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. by Peter France (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), here p. 34. Henceforth *R*, with page references (first to the French edition, then to the English translation) incorporated in the text.

[2] Christian Angelet, 'Des *Confessions* aux *Rêveries:* Le Retour à l'existence primitive', *French Studies in Southern Africa*, 8, 1979, 49–59.

[3] Alain Grosrichard, '"Où suis-je, qui suis-je?", Réflexions sur la question de la place dans l'œuvre de J.-J. Rousseau, à partir d'un texte des *Rêveries*', *Rousseau et Voltaire en 78*, Actes du colloque international de Nice (Geneva: Slatkine, 1978), pp. 338–65.

the extinction and the enjoyment of the self.[4] What has not been made sufficiently clear is that, in this toing and froing between the urge to cosmic non-differentiation and the assertive enjoyment of self, Rousseau is trying his hand at the practice of self, the arts of selfhood, associated with the tradition of *epimelia heautou* ('le souci de soi', the care of the self), an ancient mode of philosophizing aimed at the attainment of wisdom through freedom from worry *(ataraxia)*.[5] The reading of the *Rêveries* offered here sets the work in this tradition.

The 'care of the self' is of course central to Christian as well as pagan asceticism. But in the ancient world it is framed by an experience of self different from our own. For the later Rousseau, a Christian practice of the self militates against human fulfilment. The individual is defined by inner depths, secret thoughts, and the besieging presence of temptation. Self-awareness thus takes the form of a searching introspection aimed at renunciation of the ego through its decipherment. In ancient philosophy, on the other hand, the objective of 'care of the self' is self-government. It is a matter of exercising sovereignty over oneself and taking pleasure in oneself.

While certain critics have shown how elements of the Christian tradition influenced Rousseau's work, others have pointed out that he mistrusted the illusions and excesses of Christian mysticism. As far as the *Rêveries* are concerned, recurrent bursts of guilt and introspection clearly place the work in the tradition of spiritual autobiography and to that degree make it a 'sequel' to the *Confessions*. When he examines himself in respect of lying (Fourth Walk) or of good works (Sixth Walk), Rousseau is seeking an intimate truth and does not always avoid the movement of avowal and self-justification of the

[4] Pierre Bayard, 'Ecriture et espace intérieur dans les *Rêveries*', *Littératures, 11* (1984), 43–53.

[5] On the definition of *le souci de soi*, see Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 1993), pp. 91–2; *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* (Paris: Gallimard, Folio, coll. Essais, 1995), pp. 66–9; Michel Foucault, *Le Souci de soi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), pp. 53–85; 'Les Techniques de soi', in *Dits et écrits*, IV, (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 783–813. On Rousseau and ancient philosophy, see Yves Touchefeu's bibliography, *L'Antiquité et le christianisme dans la pensée de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (EHESS thesis, 1992), and Gisèle Bretonneau, *Stoïcisme et valeurs chez J.-J. Rousseau* (Paris: Sedes, 1977).

Translator's note: Key works in translation include Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1986); and Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. by Michael Chase, ed. by Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

Confessions. But where the Christian tradition of self-examination leads to abolishing the self as ego, the writing of the *Rêveries* constitutes a practice, a set of exercises, in self-fashioning or self-care. The injunction to 'know yourself' becomes subordinated, as in ancient thought, to the precept 'take care of yourself'. The question of the truth of the self as ego yields to that of the inner conditions of tranquillity of soul and self-enjoyment, as the programmatic declarations of the First Walk emphasize:

> le désir d'être mieux connu des hommes s'étant éteint dans mon cœur, n'y laisse qu'une indifférence profonde sur le sort et de mes vrais écrits et des monuments de mon innocence [...]. Si on m[']enlève [ces feuilles] de mon vivant, on ne m'enlèvera ni le plaisir de les avoir écrites, ni le souvenir de leur contenu, ni les méditations solitaires dont elles sont le fruit et dont la source ne peut s'éteindre qu'avec mon âme.
>
> the desire to be better known has died in my heart, leaving me profoundly indifferent to the fate both of my true writings and of the proofs of my innocence [...]. If [these pages] are taken from me, I shall not lose the pleasure of having written them, nor the memory of what they contain, nor the solitary meditations which inspired them and whose source will never run dry as long as I live. (*R* 11/34)

The reverie breaks with two forms of writing: autobiographical narrative and the philosophical treatise. It is a reflexive activity that aims to act upon the self. The Third Walk, which recounts a spiritual itinerary, retraces the stages of the quest for principles in the *Profession de foi d'un vicaire savoyard* and underlines the functions that its author assigns to the effort of reflection. Here Rousseau opposes the theoretical knowledge required in writing for others to the concrete attitude of self-commitment motivating his own quest:

> J'en ai beaucoup vu qui philosophaient bien plus doctement que moi, mais leur philosophie leur était pour ainsi dire étrangère. [...] Ils étudiaient la nature humaine pour en pouvoir parler savamment, mais non pas pour se connaître; ils travaillaient pour instruire les autres, mais non pas pour s'éclairer en dedans. [...] Pour moi quand j'ai désiré d'apprendre c'était pour savoir moi-même et non pas pour enseigner.
>
> I have met many men who were more learned in their philosophizing, but their philosophy remained as it were external to them. [...] They studied human nature in order to speak knowledgeably about it, not in order to know themselves; their efforts were directed to the instruction of others and not to their own inner enlightenment. [...] For my part, when I have set out to learn something, my aim has been to gain knowledge for myself and not to be a teacher. (*R* 27/48–9)

This is a conception of philosophy developed by paganism and early Christianity through their stress on the practice of self-examination, or *askesis* (extensively studied by both Pierre Hadot and the late Foucault). The conception of thought as an exercise in self-fashioning explains why Rousseau renounces not only the treatise, but also autobiographical narrative. In this 'formless record' of his reveries (*R* 9/32), he is no longer concerned with revealing his identity, saying who he is, making himself known to an addressee. Narrative form alone could reveal this identity inasmuch as emplotment ('mise en intrigue') effects what Paul Ricœur calls a temporal synthesis of the heterogeneous, drawing a unified configuration out of the diversity of succession.[6] Overlapping in this respect with the tradition of the Montaigne-style 'essay', the *Rêveries* are less concerned with constituting a 'narrative identity' (Ricœur) than with engaging in the exercise of self. In Montaigne's well-known terms, they aim to portray not being (*l'estre*) but passing (*le passage*):

> Mon but [...] est de me rendre compte des modifications de mon âme et de leurs successions. Je ferai sur moi-même à quelque égard les opérations que font les physiciens sur l'air pour en connaître l'état journalier. J'appliquerai le baromètre à mon âme. [...] Je me contenterai de tenir le registre des opérations sans chercher à les réduire en système. Je fais la même entreprise que Montaigne, mais avec un but tout contraire au sien: car il n'écrivait ses *Essais* que pour les autres, et je n'écris mes rêveries que pour moi.
>
> My aim [...] is to give an account of the successive variations of my soul. I shall perform upon myself the sort of operation that physicists conduct upon the air in order to discover its daily fluctuations. I shall take barometer readings of my soul. [...] I shall content myself with keeping a record of my readings without reducing them to a system. My enterprise is like Montaigne's, but my motive is entirely different, for he wrote his essays only for others to read, whereas I am writing down my reveries for myself alone. (*R* 10–11/34–5)

The *Rêveries* are announced as a writing of inner self-sufficiency *(autarkeia)*, of an 'inner moral life' (*R* 10/33). Self-examination has become an exercise rather than the assertive revelation of a true self. In the Fourth Walk, a meditation on the theme of lying, which ends with a questioning of the image of a Rousseau devoted to truth-telling, the author distinguishes the prudent attitude of introspection from the naive illusions of autobiographical narrative. The obsession with conspiracies, a gnawing affliction which condemned him to isolation,

[6] Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit*, 3 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1983–85), II, pp. 287–98.

led Rousseau to seek in exercises engaging thought, imagination and emotion, an art of living that would allow him to attain the inner freedom and peace that come of *autarkeia:* 'J'appris [...] par ma propre expérience que la source du vrai bonheur est en nous, et qu'il ne dépend pas des hommes de rendre vraiment misérable celui qui sait vouloir être heureux' [I learnt from my own experience that the source of true happiness is within us and that it is not in the power of men to make anyone miserable who is determined to be happy] (*R* 14/36).

Exercise for Death

Among the spiritual exercises in the tradition taken up by the *Rêveries* is the act of detachment practised by the Platonists and the Stoics, whereby one prepares for death by separating oneself spiritually from one's body. The First Walk evokes such a separation:

> Dans ce désœuvrement du corps mon âme est encore active, elle produit encore des sentiments, des pensées, et sa vie interne et morale semble encore s'être accrue par la mort de tout intérêt terrestre et temporel. Mon corps n'est plus pour moi qu'un embarras, qu'un obstacle, et je m'en dégage d'avance autant que je puis.
>
> Though my body is idle, my soul remains active and continues to produce feelings and thoughts, indeed its inner moral life seems further enhanced by the loss of all earthly and temporal interests. My body is but a hindrance and an obstacle to me now, and I do all I can to sever my ties with it in advance. (*R* 10/33)

This exercise presupposes that the self is entirely circumscribed in the present. Right from the First Walk, Rousseau stresses his deliverance from past and future, fear and hope, two sources of agitation occasioned by representations of the future. The Fifth Walk, evoking moments of ecstasy on the island of Saint-Pierre, defines happiness, in line with the Epicurean tradition, as the pure pleasure of existing that comes from concentration on the present:

> Mais s'il est un état où l'âme trouve une assiette assez solide pour s'y reposer tout entière et rassembler là tout son être, sans avoir besoin de rappeler le passé ni d'enjamber sur l'avenir, [...] tant que cet état dure celui qui s'y trouve peut s'appeler heureux, non d'un bonheur imparfait, pauvre et relatif, tel que celui qu'on trouve dans les plaisirs de la vie mais d'un bonheur suffisant, parfait et plein, qui ne laisse dans l'âme aucun vide qu'elle sente le besoin de remplir.
>
> But if there is a state in which the soul can find a resting-place secure enough to establish itself and concentrate its entire being there, with no need to remember the past or reach into the future, [...] as long as this state lasts, we can call ourselves happy, not with a poor, incomplete and relative happiness such as we

find in the pleasures of life, but with a sufficient, complete and perfect happiness which leaves no void to be filled in the soul. (*R* 70–71/88)

The detachment and serenity sought by Rousseau have to be seen in the context of a work of his old age, which aims to banish the fear of death and prepare actively for death through exercises geared towards securing release from the sources of agitation and gaining independence of thought. Meditating at the start of the Third Walk on a line by the Athenian poet Solon, Rousseau considers how to fill his last moments, concluding: 'L'étude d'un vieillard, s'il lui en reste encore à faire, est uniquement d'apprendre à mourir' [If an old man has anything left to learn, it is the art of dying] (*R* 26/48). It is in terms of the philosophical tradition of exercising for death that we should reread the famous episode recounted in the Second Walk. Rousseau here evokes how he regained consciousness after the accident at Ménilmontant during which he suffered a wound to his jaw. Numerous critics have compared this to the event recounted by Montaigne in a chapter of the *Essais* entitled, very significantly, 'De l'exercitation'.[7] Like Montaigne, Rousseau takes a fall that leaves him unconscious, and like Montaigne he describes the agreeable sensations experienced on awakening:

La nuit s'avançait. J'aperçus le ciel, quelques étoiles, et un peu de verdure. Cette première sensation fut un moment délicieux. Je ne me sentais encore que par-là. Je naissais dans cet instant à la vie, et il me semblait que je remplissais de ma légère existence tous les objets que j'apercevais. Tout entier au moment présent je ne me souvenais de rien; je n'avais nulle notion distincte de mon individu, pas la moindre idée de ce qui venait de m'arriver; je ne savais ni qui j'étais ni où j'étais; je ne sentais ni mal, ni crainte, ni inquiétude. [...] Je sentais dans tout mon être un calme ravissant, auquel chaque fois que je me le rappelle, je ne trouve rien de comparable dans toute l'activité des plaisirs connus.

Night was coming on. I saw the sky, some stars, and a few leaves. This first sensation was a moment of delight. I was conscious of nothing else. In that instant I was born to life, and it seemed as if all I perceived was filled with my frail existence. Entirely taken up by the present, I could remember nothing; I had no distinct notion of myself as a person, nor the slightest notion of what had just happened to me; I knew not who I was nor where I was; I felt neither pain, fear, nor anxiety. [...] I felt throughout my entire being such a wonderful calm, that whenever I recall it I can find nothing comparable in all the pleasures that stir our lives. (*R* 17/39)

[7] See the editor's note in Montaigne, *Essais*, 3rd edn, ed. by Pierre Villey, 3 vols (Paris: PUF, 1978), II, p. 370, which glosses the term *exercitation as* 'exercise, the act of exercising oneself'.

As in the corresponding passage from Montaigne, all sense of individuality has disappeared. Consciousness has been reduced to sensation, and the inability to distinguish the inner world from the outer has abolished the frontiers of the self and all perception of time.

Yet the surrounding context in the *Rêveries* is very different from that found in the *Essais*. Rousseau goes on to recount how he was believed dead, and reverts to his obsession with persecutors bent on disfiguring both him and his works. In Montaigne, the account of coming round intervenes to illustrate a reflection on the impossibility of knowing what is experienced by a man passing from life to death. Montaigne's experience following his horse-riding accident offers him one of those rare occasions when it becomes possible to imagine what is felt by a dying man. We cannot practise dying, but whenever a violent accident momentarily deprives us of consciousness, we can tame death, approach it, glimpse its true face. The experience of regaining consciousness is described in order to persuade us that the approach of death is a peaceful, agreeable state, characterized by the eclipse of our sense of self and time.

Rousseau evokes his death in order to deny it. Following his accident, he was believed dead, and he takes this error to be proof of a plot against him. This resurgence of paranoia seems to close the breach opened up by the description of his return to consciousness, which the author leaves unjustified by any explicit reflection. Why does he foreground this 'singular state', which, unlike the ecstasies described in the Fifth Walk, is not followed by any analysis of the reasons for his sense of elation? At the age of sixty-four, Rousseau has experienced a blackout inducing an incomparable pleasure linked to the loss of all individuality and sense of time. The next Walk is a meditation on the only sort of knowledge an old man should seek to acquire: learning how to die. Preparing for death is implicitly evoked by Rousseau's description of his 'singular state', but, as if he were retreating, the link between his accident and his own death is explained only in terms of the exteriority of others' plots against him. The same detour, this time in the form of a symbolic anecdote, occurs at the end of the Ninth Walk. In this reverie, nostalgia for relations with others is expressed through an idealized sociability, as represented in the scene of the little girl selling apples and in that of the wafer-seller. In either case the narrator's justification of himself as he assumes the role of do-gooder spreading happiness among children

barely disguises the bad conscience of the live-alone father.

The exercise of dying, which ought to result in a rendering of Rousseau's moral balance sheet, proves abortive. Rousseau comes close to it in an oblique way when he concludes the Ninth Walk by recounting how he paid for an old pensioner to cross the river Seine with him: an advance payment to Charon, perhaps, for the peace of his soul after the ultimate crossing. In this episode, the spiritual exercise founded on effort has given way to a loose association of ideas, resulting in an indirect, symbolic representation of death.

Detachment and 'Physical Perspective'

Exercising for death is part of a therapeutics of the soul, an attempted liberation from individual passions and all sources of agitation. Rousseau leans heavily on Plato and the Stoics in his evocation of the quest for serenity through inner self-sufficiency. The therapeutic work of self upon self informs both the opening Walk, where Rousseau stresses that resignation alone has brought him calm in adversity, and the Eighth Walk, which deals with his attempt to convert self-love (*amour-propre*) into proper love of self (*amour de soi*), and correlatively agitation into tranquillity, by detaching himself from 'the tyranny of public opinion' (*R* 112/129).

In further pursuit of serenity, Rousseau determines to regard all outrages against him as purely physical events detached from any human intention. It is the representation of the ill-will of others that occasions suffering, the antidote being to consider ill-will an inevitable, quasi-material cause:

> Dans tous les maux qui nous arrivent, nous regardons plus à l'intention qu'à l'effet. Une tuile qui tombe d'un toit peut nous blesser davantage mais ne nous navre pas tant qu'une pierre lancée à dessein par une main malveillante.
>
> In all the ills that befall us, we are more concerned by the intention than the result. A tile that falls off a roof may injure us more seriously, but it will not wound us so deeply as a stone thrown deliberately by a malevolent hand. (*R* 110/128)

One critique of Rousseau inspired by psychiatry[8] has construed this mechanistic vision of other-relations as a sign of schizophrenia. The author may well be struggling against his own persecution complex, but this pathological dimension enhances the spiritual exercise,

[8] Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, 5 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibl. de la Pléiade, 1959), I, p. 1078, n. 2.

making it, in Jean Starobinski's words, not just 'the monotonous repetition of a crazy conviction' but 'the melodious song of a voice defending the soul against its destruction'.[9]

One is not surprised here to find Rousseau rediscovering the method of a Stoic who has also inspired commentaries of a psychiatric nature, Marcus Aurelius. In his own therapeutics of the soul, the emperor-philosopher is concerned with controlling the way we are affected by exteriority. The achievement of peace of mind depends on our ability to master our inner discourse by working on our representations of exteriority. Events and situations are to be apprehended in a 'physical' perspective whereby we shake off a system of human values distorted by considerations born of passion. This fallacious system which orientates our judgments is pride (Greek *typhos*, smoke, vapour), personified as 'an archseducer of reason' who surrounds things with a veil of deceitful fictions.[10] For Rousseau too, arrogance is the root of the evil we must work to 'eradicate' so as to be able to accept the course of things by considering all that befalls us as 'autant d'actes d'une pure fatalité où je ne devais supposer ni direction, ni intention, ni cause morale' [so many incidences of sheer fatality in which I should not seek to find any intention, purpose, or moral cause] (*R* 111/128–9). Marcus Aurelius resolves to stick to primary representations, to assess any injury suffered without pinning on it a value judgment not founded in reality. Rousseau in turn finds the path of detachment by transforming *amour-propre*, seen as an 'artificial passion', into a caring love of self that partakes of the 'natural order' (*R* 112/129). For Marcus Aurelius, our *typhos* prevents the soul from acceding to that cosmic perspective on which wisdom depends. The Eighth Walk describes a similar effort to free our evaluations of injuries to ourselves from any concern for the opinion of others:

> J'ai retrouvé la paix de l'âme et presque la félicité. [...] Les offenses, les vengeances, les passe-droits, les outrages, les injustices, ne sont rien pour celui qui ne voit dans les maux qu'il endure que le mal même et non pas l'intention, pour celui dont la place ne dépend pas dans sa propre estime de celle qu'il plaît aux autres de lui accorder.

[9] Jean Starobinski, *La Transparence et l'obstacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 316.

[10] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, World's Classics, 1990), Book VI, 13 (p. 45).

> I recovered my peace of mind and happiness. [...] Insults, reprisals, offences, injuries, injustices are all nothing to the man who sees in the hardships he suffers nothing but the hardships themselves and not the intention behind them, and whose place in his own self-esteem does not depend on the good-will of others. (*R* 112/130)

Once more, a return to the order of nature allows one to attain the detachment and indifference necessary for the cure of the soul.

The contemplation of nature is another form of 'physical' spiritual exercise that makes the life of the sage an everyday celebration. Such was the view of Plutarch, fervently read by Rousseau.[11] Likewise, in Aristotle, Lucretius, and Epictetus, allowing for variations between different schools of thought, the spectacle of nature takes on associations of voluptuousness, wisdom, and magnanimity. In the *Rêveries*, this particular form of spiritual exercise takes the form of botanizing as it provokes joyful admiration at the subtle complexity of plant life. In the Seventh Walk, Rousseau inquires into his passion for botanizing and emphasizes that it too plays a part in his mastering of both inner discourse and the representations to which he is subjected by his imagination:

> un instinct qui m'est naturel me faisant fuir toute idée attristante imposa silence à mon imagination, et fixant mon attention sur les objets qui m'environnaient me fit pour la premiere fois détailler le spectacle de la nature [...], le seul spectacle du monde dont [les] yeux et [le] cœur [de l'homme] ne se lassent jamais.
>
> an instinct that is natural to me averted my eyes from every depressing thought, silenced my imagination and, fixing my attention on the objects surrounding me, made me look closely for the first time at the details of the great pageant of nature [...], the only [spectacle] of which [man's] eyes and heart can never grow weary. (*R* 90/107–08)

Following ancient philosophy, and particularly the Epicureans, Rousseau sees such contemplation as acceding to the pure feeling of existence, and therefore as the source of true happiness. Whereas concentration on oneself grants the detachment necessary to serenity, the contemplation of nature promotes an elevation and expansion of the self into the cosmos:

> Délivré de toutes les passions terrestres qu'engendre le tumulte de la vie sociale, mon âme s'élancerait fréquemment au-dessus de cette atmosphère, et commercerait d'avance avec les intelligences célestes dont elle espère aller augmenter le nombre dans peu de temps.

[11] See Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, I, p. 1024, n. 1.

> Set free from all earthly passions that are born of the tumult of social life, my soul would often soar out of this atmosphere and converse before its time with the celestial spirits whose numbers it hopes soon to swell. (*R* 74/91)

As found in Plato, the Epicureans, and the Stoics, the metaphor of the flight of the soul is used to evoke the raptures experienced in the contemplation of nature through botanizing: 'Mon âme erre et plane dans l'univers sur les ailes de l'imagination, dans des extases qui passent toute autre jouissance' [My soul roams and soars through the universe on the wings of imagination, in ecstasies which surpass all other pleasures] (*R* 89/107).

Tension and Release

In their very linkage, the inner movements of concentration and expansion of the self evoked in the *Rêveries* are highly characteristic of the spiritual exercises of antiquity. The detachment brought about by concentration allows the contemplator to rise towards serenity and universality. Equally, the opposition outlined by some commentators between reverie as meditation and reverie as rapture[12] points up two inseparable and complementary poles of inner life, meditation corresponding to the Stoic principle of moral awareness, and rapture to the Epicurean principle of fulfilment through the joy of existing. Rousseau borrows from Epicureanism spiritual exercises of release contributing to the therapeutics of the soul. Botanizing allows him to enjoy the present amid the soothing spectacle of nature. Reviving memories of past pleasures is another of the Epicurean exercises designed to release the soul from tension. This exercise corresponds to the very project of writing the *Rêveries* in so far as, according to the First Walk, writing fixes the happiness afforded by contemplation while reading renews it.

Besides the reactualization of past pleasure as present pleasure, there is another way in which happy remembrance links up with the tradition of spiritual exercises. For Rousseau, as for the Epicureans, true pleasure supersedes duration, escapes the category of time. In offering access to a form of eternity, the moment of happiness assumes an absolute value. The radiant memory evoked in the concluding Tenth Walk allows Rousseau to relive past years of

[12] See especially Arnaud Tripet, *La Rêverie littéraire: Essai sur Rousseau* (Geneva: Droz, 1979).

fulfilment which in their very intensity become timeless. In the process, he himself accedes to a state of timeless being:

> Il n'y a pas de jour où je ne me rappelle avec joie et attendrissement cet unique et court temps de ma vie où je fus moi pleinement, sans mélange et sans obstacle, et où je puis véritablement dire avoir vécu. [...] Dans l'espace de quatre ou cinq ans j'ai joui d'un siècle de vie et d'un bonheur pur et plein qui couvre de son charme tout ce que mon sort présent a d'affreux.
>
> There is no day when I do not remember with joy and loving emotion that one short time in my life when I was fully myself, unmixed and unimpeded, and when I can genuinely claim to have lived. [...] In the space of four or five years I enjoyed a century of life and a pure and complete happiness, whose charm outweighs all that is appalling in my present fate. (*R* 136–7/153–4)

By abandoning hope (the future), by transforming the past through its reactualization, reverie concentrates on the present as that which is ample for human happiness. The thought of death is closely linked to the feeling of the simple pleasure of existing, which confers the freedom to be happy. To have experienced that feeling is to have known the timelessness of pleasure and the perfection of the present.

The Ethic of Self-Mastery

Control of representations, a key spiritual technique in Epictetus, is fostered through the exercise of walking. As Foucault observes in relation to Epictetus: 'On teste les réactions sur soi que suscite la promenade' [One tests the reactions upon oneself induced by walking].[13] In the case of Rousseau, walking becomes part of a method for mastering his overriding obsession with conspiracies. Unable to bear the sight of his 'persecutors', he realizes he can only find peace away from their sight. Hence the therapeutic value of the *solitary* walk: 'Le moment où j'échappe au cortège des méchants est délicieux, et sitôt que je me vois sous les arbres, au milieu de la verdure, je crois me voir dans le paradis terrestre' [The moment when I escape from the horde of evildoers is one of joy, and as soon as I am under the trees and surrounded by greenery, I feel as if I were in the earthly paradise] (*R* 116/133). Conscious of the vanity of his efforts to master his spontaneous reactions to what he takes to be the hatred of others, Rousseau describes a technique aimed at progressively taming

[13] Michel Foucault, 'Les Techniques de soi', in *Dits et écrits*, IV, op. cit., pp. 802–03. On the influence of Epictetus on Rousseau, see Edward E. Malkin, 'Rousseau and Epictetus', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, CVI (1973), 113–55.

his feelings, not by any effort of will but through a letting-go presented as the precondition for regaining self-control. The letting-go takes the form of an explosion of anger. But Rousseau continues:

> Après avoir laissé faire au naturel sa première explosion, l'on peut redevenir son propre maître en reprenant peu à peu ses sens [...]. Et cessant d'employer ma force en vaine résistance j'attends le moment de vaincre en laissant agir ma raison, car elle ne me parle que quand elle peut se faire écouter.
>
> Once nature has had this initial explosion one can become one's own master again and gradually recover one's senses. [...] Instead of wasting my efforts on pointless resistance, I wait for the moment when I can achieve victory by appealing to my reason, for it only speaks when it can make itself heard. (*R* 117/134)

From this point on, however, a serious complication arises as Rousseau begins to express doubts. Is it reason that activates the return to inner peace, or is it a natural movement as involuntary as the one that preceded it? A brief detour via the *Confessions* is necessary here to bring out what is at stake in this complication.

In Rousseau's analysis of both the fluctuations affecting his psyche and his efforts to control them, there recur elements of the *Morale sensitive*, a project mentioned in Book IX of the *Confessions*. As Rousseau presents these elements, they could be seen as a sort of compromise between the sensualism of Locke and Condillac and the Stoic techniques of self-government through regimes imposed on both body and soul:

> Les frappantes et nombreuses observations que j'avais recueillies [...] me paraissaient propres à fournir un *régime* extérieur qui varié selon les circonstances pouvait mettre ou maintenir l'âme dans l'état le plus favorable à la vertu. [...] Tout nous offre mille prises presque assurées pour *gouverner* dans leur origine les sentiments dont nous nous laissons dominer.[14]
>
> Numerous striking observations that I had collected [...] seemed to me capable of providing an external regime which, varied according to circumstances, might place or keep the soul in the state most conducive to virtue. [...] Everything offers us countless and almost certain opportunities for governing at their very source the feelings we allow to dominate us.

When in the same passage of the *Confessions* Rousseau asks us to consider the number of human errors and vices that would be eliminated if one knew how to compel the 'animal economy' to support the 'moral order', he is asserting belief in the possibility of developing a form of knowledge that would promote self-

[14] Rousseau, *Les Confessions*, in *Œuvres complètes*, I, op. cit., p. 409 (emphasis added).

government. In line with such a belief, the spiritual exercises upholding the therapeutics of the soul in the *Rêveries* belong to a classical moral conception of man, based on personal sovereignty and willpower. Amid the torment of his persecution complex, however, Rousseau also glimpses the possibility that this power of self over self may be no more than an illusion. Such is the possibility which surfaces when he admits that the regaining of self-control in the wake of an explosion of anger may be as 'natural' as the explosion itself: 'C'est mon naturel ardent qui m'agite, c'est mon naturel indolent qui m'apaise' [It is my natural ardour that excites me, and my natural indolence that pacifies me] (*R* 117/134).

Among the Walks, it is the meditative ones, particularly the Third, Fourth and Sixth, that are most characteristic of the effort of tension and self-mastery. Their dialogical structure expresses an effort of distancing and a will to resolve any problem posed. As a meditation, the Third Walk is organized in a very traditional way around a quotation which gives rise to a reflexive development. Dialogism recurs throughout, whether as the restoration of a dialogue that took place prior to writing or, in the present, as the writing of a dialogue inspired by meditation. The Fourth Walk, on lying, and the Sixth, on doing good, involve introspection and the searching of conscience. As concretized in dialogism, the reflexive doubling implied by ascesis certainly attests confidence in the power of reason. Yet Rousseau also emphasizes how his *naturel* and *tempérament* can hinder his moral position: 'Agir contre mon penchant me fut toujours impossible. [...] quand mon cœur se tait, ma volonté reste sourde' [I always found it impossible to act against my natural leanings. [...] when my heart is silent, my will remains deaf] (*R* 79/96).

Stoicism took account of the pathological dimension of the passions by closely associating exercises of the soul with those of the body and philosophical practice with medical practice. Central to the getting of wisdom, such exercises and regimes were driven by confidence in an ethic of mastery. Returning to the quest for a mode of being free from worry and dependence, the *Rêveries* develop these techniques of the self in the pursuit of inner serenity, understood as that without which there can be no moral life. This fragile compromise barely conceals the autonomy of passions with respect to will and moral strength. At the cliff's edge, between the polar disciplines of Stoic tension of spirit on the one hand and Epicurean

abandonment on the other, the author of the *Rêveries* continues to back the idea of power over oneself. As a spiritual exercise, the reverie thus bears a strong performative value in maintaining Rousseau's struggle against his recurrent persecution complex.

This accommodation between awareness of the determining power of *temperament* and the tradition of *care of the self* precedes the advent of psychiatric discourse. Sharing the views of the English alienist Crichton, Pinel would go on to argue the case for rising above metaphysics and ethics in order to consider the human passions simply as phenomena of the 'animal economy', with no relation to any idea of morality or immorality.[15] Pinel's discourse willingly concedes that self-presence does not confer power over the self, and that self-distance (consciousness of the self) does not imply any ability to decide who or how one should be. This discourse establishes the birth of psychiatry as a key moment of change in the history of subjectivity, one wherein what Gauchet and Swain call the 'intelligibility of the subjective economy' is discreetly yet decisively removed from the arena of moral interpretation.[16]

In the *Rêveries*, written some twenty years before Pinel's treatise, the techniques of the self derived from classical Greek and Roman tradition show a concern to maintain an ethic of mastery over inner determinations which are causes of suffering. The spiritual exercise attempts to liberate the self from the alienating obsession with plots and plotters. Countering the anguish of being dispossessed of power over oneself, the dream of *autarakeia* returns to the paths traced by Stoic thought, paths leading to the inner citadel, to the image of self as an island of freedom in the midst of necessity.

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[15] P. Pinel, *Traité médico-philosophique* (1800), quoted in Marcel Gauchet and Gladys Swain, *La Pratique de l'esprit humain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), pp. 347–8.
[16] Gauchet and Swain, p. 352.

IDENTITY AND IDENTIFICATION IN THE PREFACE TO NERVAL'S *LES FILLES DU FEU*

Gérard de Nerval's preface to *Les Filles du feu* is a strange text with a well-known history. On 10 December 1853, *Le Mousquetaire* published an article in which Alexandre Dumas wrote what Nerval himself went on to call 'the epitaph of my spirit'. Under the care of a doctor at the time, Nerval answered the article by letter, which text he then used as his preface to *Les Filles du feu*, published a month later in January 1854. Within this text, entitled 'A Alexandre Dumas', at once an epistolary response and a dedication, Nerval inserted a text published in 1844, the first — and only — chapter of a novel entitled *Le Roman tragique*, featuring a certain Brisacier, an actor suffering from a histrionic condition. Thus the preface takes the form of an original text woven out of strands of personal, paratextual, and fictional discourse; a text in which the criss-crossing of enunciative situations will allow the writer to define himself *qua* writer at the heart of his own poetics.

The preface is first of all Nerval's immediate response to the accusation of madness levelled against him by Dumas, whose article paints the poet as having lost control of his imagination. Nerval, according to his friend, is thereby condemned to both 'impossible theories' and 'unwritable books'.[1] The ironist in Nerval is quick to get on even terms: 'Or maintenant que je ne suis plus sur l'hippogriffe et qu'aux yeux des mortels j'ai recouvré ce qu'on appelle vulgairement la raison, — raisonnons' [Now that I'm off the griffin's back and have in the eyes of mortals recovered what is vulgarly called

[1] Nerval begins the text of this response by relating it to the preface-cum-dedication he included in *Lorely* (1852), another response to a 'necrology', this time written by Jules Janin in 1841 (the year Nerval first showed signs of serious mental disturbance).

my reason, by all means let's start reasoning].[2] Leaving aside for the moment Nerval's reference to 'what is vulgarly called reason', we can follow Martine Reid in her demonstration that the poet's project is argumentative.[3] The basis of his argument is set out at once, for it is Dumas's own text, extensively quoted by Nerval, which presents the poet's mind as subject to an occasional 'phenomenon' whereby the triumph of imagination over reason (of the madwoman in the attic over the mistress of the house) triggers off a process of hallucinatory identification with characters whose stories he tells to his interlocutors: 'Tantôt il est le roi d'Orient Salomon [...]; tantôt il est sultan de Crimée' [At times he is Solomon, king of the East [...]; at others, the sultan of Crimea] (*FF* 72).

Dumas praises the seductive and disquieting power of these stories. But for Nerval, using Dumas's own words, the main issue is how to explain (to Dumas himself) the 'phenomenon'. The phenomenon cannot be dissociated from the tale, from 'l'entraînement d'un récit', the identificatory 'lure' of a narrative. The invented tale concerns itself with the story of a character, in other words with what elaborates the character as such: the story of the events that have constituted his/her life.[4] The epitome of the imaginative narrator involved in such invention, advanced by Nerval so as to show how the identificatory process is built into the act of narrative enunciation, is Charles Nodier: 'Vous savez avec quelle conviction notre vieil ami Nodier racontait comment il avait eu le malheur d'être guillotiné à la veille de la Révolution' [You know the conviction with which our old friend Nodier used to relate how he'd had the misfortune to be guillotined on the eve of the Revolution] (*FF* 72).

We are soon introduced via Nodier to Brisacier, an historical character whose biography Nerval had at some point read, though without its leaving any clear memory in his mind. The rewriting of

[2] Gérard de Nerval, *Les Filles du feu/Les Chimères*, ed. by Jacques Bony (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1994), p. 71 (the griffin, or hippogriff, in question is that of Prince Astolfo in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, alluded to in the previous paragraph). Henceforth *FF*, with page references incorporated in the text.

[3] Martine Reid, 'Préface à un livre dangereux', in *Le Rêve et la vie*, (Paris: SEDES, 1986).

[4] As a line of thought from Hannah Arendt to Paul Ricœur has argued, answering the question 'Who?' involves telling the story of one's own life, and thereby constructing one's identitiy as an essentially 'narrative identity'. See Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit*, 3 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1983–85), I, p. 355.

Brisacier's adventures passes through an identification perfectly conscious of the world of illusion in which it is steeped. At this point the poet ironically compares Dumas's method with his own. Dumas too invents historical characters, but at no risk to his own reason. Fiction for him is but a 'game', in which the imagination plays no active role, whereas, for Nerval, narrative invention is inseparable from remembrance. One man's 'game' is another man's 'obsession' or 'vertigo', held at bay in this instance by Nerval's humour.

The problem is evidently that of the literary work produced by the narrative 'phenomenon' under examination, notably in so far as it questions the notion of the author. More concretely, the risk run is that of the 'unwritable book', as exemplified in the one and only completed chapter of Nerval's own *Le Roman tragique*, quoted later in the text of the preface. Completion and completeness can only be represented by the examples of visionary literature cited by Nerval as masterpieces: Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, Tasso's *Vision*. Thus the question of a personal accomplishment is held in abeyance until the end of the preface, where, whether as Dumas, as a reader of *Le Mousquetaire*, or as a reader of *Les Filles du feu*, one is indeed finally called upon to attend to this unfinished text, inserted into the preface like a necessary step, fiction doing its business.

Nerval is an old hand at recycling previously written texts. Here, that process takes on a particular meaning. The text in question was first published in 1844, at a time when, following his 1841 crisis, the poet was thought to have recovered, to have forsaken his pursuit of a whole 'series' of 'previous lives' for a state of unified experience and self-identity. The character of Brisacier, on the other hand, existed for real in the seventeenth century, although everything in Nerval's narrative points to its being set in the nineteenth century, and more precisely in the 1830s when the relative success of Romantic drama was resulting in a neglect of 'le culte [...] des anciens tragiques français' [the cult [...] of the old French tragedians]. Despite which Brisacier and his fellow players are performing Racine as they travel round the provinces. Less anachronistically, Brisacier's notions of how to perform tragedy accord with an identificatory style[5] char-

[5] See Gabrielle Chamarat Malandain, 'L'Image théâtrale de l'artiste: le Brisacier de Nerval', in *Nerval: Réalisme et invention* (Paris: Paradigme, 1997).

acteristic of the best-known actors of the 1830s, such as Frédéric Lemaître and Marie Dorval. In this sense one can say that his acting method is faithful to the anti-classical ideals of early Romanticism. Moreover, since what we find ourselves reading here is another letter, this one composed by Brisacier in his prison cell, the enunciative situation of this fictional fragment casts it into a complex relation with the preface as a whole. In either case, an 'I' is writing to a named addressee. Nerval's 'I' in the preface is answering Dumas; Brisacier's 'I' in *Le Roman tragique* is writing to the other members of his troupe. In either case, the letter — behind a humorous disguise in the preface, and a burlesque disguise in the inserted fiction — is a poignant call for recognition of the artist as he tries to explain the originality of his mode of expression or creation to his fellow artists.

This confusion at the level of enunciative situation is further compounded by a correspondence at the level of the 'phenomenon' being described, for both Nerval and Brisacier are the objects of a doubling whose dangerous implications they are ready to face. Like Nerval, Brisacier as actor is caught up in a process of identification, in his case with the Racinian characters he plays on stage. In its lengthy description of this process, Brisacier's discourse explains how his love for the actress L'Etoile heightens his emotions. Confusing the figure of the tragic heroine with the woman he loves in reality, he in turn identifies with the heroes he plays: Achilles, Nero. The 'fire' then burning in his breast leads him to deem Racine's text inadequate: too harmonious and cold, too much the work of a 'rhetor'. The weaknesses of the text combine with those of outdated staging and a timorous public to hamper the expression of true passion. A climax is reached with the role of Nero, whose character is so reductively treated by the playwright that Brisacier feels compelled to transgress Racine's discourse, identifying in the process with the arsonist:

> Néron! je t'ai compris, hélas! non pas d'après Racine, mais d'après mon cœur déchiré quand j'osais emprunter ton nom! Oui tu fus un dieu, toi qui voulais brûler Rome et qui en avais le droit, peut-être, puisque Rome t'avait insulté! (*FF* 78)
>
> Nero! Alas, I understood you not according to Racine, but following my own broken heart whenever I dared borrow your name! Yes, you were a god, you who wished to burn down Rome and perhaps had the right so to do, since Rome had insulted you!

Whereas Nerval engages in irony, Brisacier's second-degree mode, inserted and therefore integrated into the discourse of the preface, is

the burlesque. For the burlesque effectively reveals the root of all evil to be overweening sincerity. Not only theatre-goers but other actors resign themselves to a stuffy, restrained style of acting matched by dour stage-sets and conventional costumes. At the end of his monologue, Brisacier recounts how, once out of the theatre, he and his fellow players feel so ashamed of their profession that they pass themselves off as noblemen. In either case, being an artist carries with it a measure of shame, as evidenced on stage by a reserved style of acting and off stage by a concern not to be seen to be different from the local gentry. Such desire for social acceptance recalls certain aspects of the article to which Nerval's entire preface is a reply, most notably Dumas's smug collusion with his readers, which, paired with his haughty attitude towards Nerval, says much about his own self-assurance as a best-selling author. The successful writer is one who has set himself on the same ideological footing as his readers and is therefore able to engage with them in a dialogue of equals. The parties to such a dialogue confirm their bond by castigating the artist, who, at the risk of causing displeasure and situating himself beyond the pale, accepts the loss of his social identity in the name of his identity *qua* artist. Like the discourse of the 'madman', Brisacier's acting is out of place, uncalled for. In either case, the speaking subject is exposed and reduced to ridicule, condemned to tragic solitude, and thereby deprived of his *raison d'être*: the ability to exercise his art. Given that social identity is precisely what the subject in question has renounced, no other salvation, no other redemptive form of identity, is available but that offered by the office and practice of art.

Advised in a letter from another actress to give up theatre altogether, Brisacier replies: 'Hélas! cette plaisanterie est amère, car jamais je n'eus davantage besoin, sinon de l'art, du moins de ses produits brillants' [Alas, this can only be a bitter joke, for never has my need been greater, if not for art, then at least for the brilliance of its products] (*FF* 80). Shifting from the paradigm of art to that of poetry, yet nevertheless echoing this remark by a fictional character of his own creation, Nerval goes on to declare in the very last sentence of his preface: 'la dernière folie qui me restera probablement, ce sera de me croire poète: c'est à la critique de m'en guérir' [my last remaining folly will most likely be to believe myself a poet: and it's up to the critics to cure me of that] (*FF* 82]. Introducing *Les Chimères* at the end of his preface, Nerval reaffirms that the true site of his

madness lies in his conviction that he is a 'poet'.

The juxtaposition of Brisacier's monologue and Nerval's preface brings out subtle correspondences between what for the writer presides over poetic creation and what for the actor is involved in the performance of his role. Each realizes a true identity by identifying with the character whose story he tells or whose part he plays. In so doing, moreover, each crosses a certain line: a line drawn around the literary text as generally conceived at a given moment in history. Brisacier attacks the classical taste of Racine as represented by the prevailing nineteenth-century view of the dramatist. This is the classical taste castigated by Nerval in his theatre criticism and, among other places, in 'Histoire de la Reine du matin et de Soliman le prince des génies', one of the tales of his *Voyage en Orient* (1851), via the character of Adoniram. Nerval's anti-classicism finds its ultimate expression in what one might call the poetics of the *chimère*, or 'chimera'.[6] This is precisely the word used by Dumas in his 1853 article when describing the world of hallucinations in which the poet loses his way and his identity: a word subsequently assumed by Nerval himself when, in the last paragraph of his preface, he alludes to the twelve sonnets added on to *Les Filles du feu* and collectively known as *Les Chimères*:

> Et puisque vous avez eu l'imprudence de citer un des sonnets composés dans cet état de rêverie *super-naturaliste*, comme diraient les Allemands, il faut que vous les entendiez tous — vous les trouverez à la fin du volume. (*FF* 82)
>
> And since you have been so unwise as to quote one of the sonnets composed in this state of *super-naturalist reverie*, as the Germans would say, you shall have to listen to the lot of them — and shall find them at the end of the volume.

As Brisacier the actor struts the stage, creating heroes such as Achilles or Nero who are unacceptable to the public, he is essentially no different from the writer proposing a work that neither Dumas nor his usual audience judge readable. The difference, if there is one, lies in the fact that both Brisacier as a character and the narrative which brings him to 'life' remain unfinished, whereas Nerval the writer continues to write and complete *Les Filles du feu*, *Les Chimères*, and *Aurélia*,[7] so proving that these texts were indeed, *pace* Dumas, possible

[6] More generally the French word *chimère* also means a wild or fanciful dream (translator's note).

[7] Only the second part of *Aurélia*, with its loose narrative line, can be considered incomplete. Yet even this exception has successfully survived the test of time.

and writable. Ending on this very point, Nerval's preface picks up the thread of an argument held over from an earlier stage of his reply to Dumas. In between comes the extract from *Le Roman tragique*, which can now more clearly be seen to have itself constituted a stage of argument: one allowing the poet to explain the successive phases of the creative process by actualizing them in and as fiction. Evoked at the start of the preface as the ideal model, Dante will appear once more at the beginning of *Aurélia*, this time as the exemplary predecessor. The real answer to Dumas is the book brought to completion, and to a completion whose norms are not those of the author of *Les Trois Mousquetaires*. For to overstep 'ce qu'on appelle vulgairement la raison' [what is vulgarly called reason] (*FF* 71) is to accept the risk of one's work not being well received. Dumas's article in *Le Mousquetaire* proves that he had hardly read Nerval at all. From a range of publications including at the time *Les Faux Saulniers*, *La Bohème galante*, *Petits Châteaux de bohème*, *Lorely*, and *Les Nuits d'octobre*, Dumas cites only *Léo Burckart* (in order to recall that he collaborated in it) and the *Voyage en Orient* (about which he has nothing to say). The 'cher maître' [dear master] to whom Nerval dedicates his volume of writings embroiders on history by adapting his inventions to the tastes of his public. In confusing history and fiction, he produces a romanticized history, an art of the novel that misses history and fails truth. And in this he is not unlike the version of Nero filtered through centuries of literature and historical studies, the very same Nero whom Brisacier rejects:

> Hé quoi! ce fut là ce Néron tant célébré de Rome? ce beau lutteur, ce danseur, ce poète ardent, dont la seule envie était de plaire à tous? Voilà donc ce que l'histoire en a fait et ce que les poètes en ont rêvé d'après l'histoire. (*FF* 78)
>
> Come now! Is the Nero whose one and only wish was to please everyone the same man as the great fighter, the dancer, the passionate poet, the man so celebrated by Rome? This is what history has made of him, and what poets have dreamed up on the basis of history.

Dumas's playing-around with 'our chronicles and memoirs' is for Nerval a deceitful and sterile dream, whereas the dream of unreason is closer to the active and fruitful truth. To put it another way, the Nero who set fire to Rome is a far cry from Racine's languid lover.

The fact remains that the adventure of writing as metaphorically proposed and expressed by Brisacier exposes the artist setting out on it to high risks. As we have seen, Brisacier sits in his prison cell, an

abandoned man. Composing the epitaph of Nerval's spirit, Dumas's article considers the poet dead to the world of art. The sorry fate shared by Brisacier and Nerval certifies the form of death to oneself and to the world represented by poetic commitment. This is what Brisacier means when he compares the giving of oneself to one's role with the burning occasioned by the tunic of Nessus:

> Oui, depuis cette soirée, ma folie est de me croire un Romain, un empereur; mon rôle s'est identifié à moi-même, et la tunique de Néron s'est collée à mes membres qu'elle brûle, comme celle du centaur dévorait Hercule expirant. (*FF* 79)
>
> Yes, since that evening my madness has been to believe myself a Roman, an emperor; my role has become identified with myself, and Nero's tunic has stuck to my limbs, which it burns, as that of the centaur consumed the dying Hercules.

This sacrifice of social identity at the risk of the oneness of personal identity takes the form of a conflagration. Brisacier identifying with Nero, wishing to burn down (the) theatre, and with it all the conventions that impede his creative freedom, is a metaphor of the artist subverting through unreason the playhouse of artifice in which the literature of his time is performed.

The two terms of the metaphor are cleverly coordinated. Whether playing a role or writing a narrative, for instance, one is shown essentially to be entering into the story of a character. Nerval explains this to Dumas at the beginning of his letter:

> Hé bien, comprenez-vous que l'entraînement d'un récit puisse produire un effet semblable; que l'on arrive pour ainsi dire à s'incarner dans le héros de son imagination, si bien que sa vie devienne la vôtre et que l'on brûle des flammes factices de ses ambitions et de ses amours! (*FF* 72–3)
>
> Well, do you realize that the lure of a narrative can produce just such an effect? That one can come as it were to be embodied in the hero of one's own imagination, to the point where his life becomes yours and you are consumed by the unreal flames of his ambitions and passions!

Through a concentric play of mirrors starting with the lure undergone by certain storytellers, we are brought first to the writer Nerval fascinated by the character of Brisacier, and from there to Brisacier's own identification with his dramatic roles. Just before the insertion of the long Brisacier monologue, the psychic process at work in such splitting is specified in the celebrated formula, borrowed from an unnamed moralist: 'Inventer, au fond, c'est se ressouvenir' [To invent is really to remember] (*FF* 73). It is Nerval's uncertain recollection of

the book he once read about Brisacier that leads to the substitution of memory proper and the progressive confusion between the story of the character and that of the subject. The whole of the first part of the text is based on the alternation proposed in Dumas's article on Nerval between the register of *being* and that of *narrating*. However, the register which under Dumas's pen had become mixed up with that of a chimerical and hallucinatory imagination becomes in Nerval's discourse associated with that of invention and illusion understood as the founding principles of the literature of the great story-tellers: Nodier, Voisenon, Moncriff and Crébillon Fils, followed later in the preface by Dante, Tasso, and Cicero.

Although the essential nature of the link between narrative and creation is posited early in the preface, it is not until the last part, when the voice of Nerval takes over once more from that of Brisacier, that its full import is clarified. Nerval does indeed follow through on 'l'entraînement du récit' [the lure of narrative] described early on. The fact that Brisacier's story will go on to show him being reduced by his companions to the state of a 'monster' would merely confirm Dumas's worst suspicions. In the case of Nerval, however, it prompts an unexpected metamorphosis of his narrative project:

> Une fois persuadé que j'écrivais ma propre histoire, je me suis mis à traduire tous mes rêves, toutes mes émotions, je me suis attendri à cet amour pour une *étoile* fugitive qui m'abandonnait dans la nuit de ma destinée, j'ai pleuré, j'ai frémi des vaines apparitions du sommeil. (*FF* 82)
>
> Once persuaded that I was writing my own story, I began to translate all my dreams and emotions; I became moved by this love for an elusive *star* abandoning me in the darkness of my destiny; I shed tears and shuddered at the hollow apparitions of sleep.

Here Nerval replaces the daydreams evoked by Dumas with the order — or rather disorder — of nocturnal phantasms. Having once passed over from the other's story to one's own, one arrives at the *récit de rêve*, the dream narrative. Invention is always composed of 'memories', but of memories concerning the innermost core of the dreamer's life. The writing project which then appears in some sense inverts the direction of the creative work described in the first part of the letter-cum-preface. Narrative coherence is no longer assured by identification with the character whose truth springs forth from his/her relation to the lived experience of the writing subject; it is now something to be sought by this same subject through his grappling

with the apparent hollowness of the 'monsters' of sleep. Writing works its way into the labyrinth of the imaginary. It is within this phantasmatic universe that coherence must come about, that the confusion of impressions must, by a conscious effort of thought on the part of the storyteller, be recomposed into a narrative. Such a resolution implies an underlying conflict between two orders, as Nerval himself suggests in the last lines of his penultimate paragraph:

> Puis un rayon divin a lui dans mon enfer; entouré de monstres contre lesquels je luttais obscurément, j'ai saisi le fil d'Ariane et dès lors toutes mes visions sont devenues célestes. Quelque jour j'écrirai l'histoire de cette 'descente aux enfers', et vous verrez qu'elle n'a pas été entièrement dépourvue de raisonnement si elle a toujours manqué de raison. (*FF* 82)
>
> Then a divine ray of light shone into my hell; surrounded by monsters against which I was vaguely struggling, I grasped Ariadne's thread, and from that point on all my visions became heavenly. Some day I shall write the story of this 'descent into the Underworld', and you shall see that it was not entirely devoid of reasoning, even if it always lacked reason.

This final opposition between reasoning and reason appropriately rounds off a text aimed at getting as close as possible to determining the originality of a work whose writing endlessly oscillates between narration and poetry. The 'reason' Nerval evokes in concluding is that cold reason of soulless actors who fear being taken for 'd'infâmes histrions' [clowns who ham it up] by the local dignitaries; that too of the storyteller to whom he dedicates his volume and who, in his narratives as in his life, can't be bothered with any situation beyond the straight and narrow. 'Reasoning', on the other hand, is that canny logic already at work in the text of the introduction, a logic at once argumentative and metaphorical, destined to travel deep into strange lands, where vulgar good sense has ceased to be operative in the order of plausibility but where thought remains active in the order of truth.

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WHO AM I DYING? ADRIEN BERTRAND'S *L'APPEL DU SOL*

The grammatical eccentricity of my title is deliberate. One would expect: 'Who am I, dying?' Without a comma after 'I', it looks as if 'dying' ought to be a transitive verb, with 'who' (in modern English) as its direct object. The resultant ambiguity in 'Who am I dying?' is intended to suggest important implications of a strong impression one gets when reading *L'Appel du sol*. The impression itself is relatively simple. It is that, for narrator and for author, both subject matter and subjects do matter. The subject matter includes, among other things, war and discussion of the meaning of war by the characters. As for subjects, there are two different sorts that appear to matter. The first is the subject *of* the text, its thematic content. This consists of three questions, each of which implies the others: Why are these men willing to die for their country? What is this country? Who and what are these men? The circularity here is important, because it is a mode of infinite regression: the only answer to any of the questions is another question.

As the third question shows, the other sort of subject is subject *in* the text — the who and what of these men as selves conscious of the world around them and of themselves. Reading Adrien Bertrand's other wartime texts then confirms that these things do also matter for the author himself — indeed, that he is using the texts to ask the same questions about himself. Without wanting to make of Bertrand a philosopher that he was not, I hope to show how, in his wartime fiction, the 'I' as subject is a function of linguistic expression, whether by the 'I' or by another: it is accessible only to intuition, through mediation; its implacable reality is to be the 'very one' that is in endless regression and evolution because, endlessly indescribable, it endlessly demands to be described.

The impression that subject-matter and subjects matter may be simple, but Bertrand's treatment of these considerations has four

much less simple implications. All are suggested in the unsettling ambiguity of: 'Who am I dying?' Before listing them, I should briefly dispose of five primitive notions that underlie the foregoing remarks and the rest of the discussion. The *self* is a mental representation, in varying degrees intuitive, affective and reasoned, of the relation between the agent, or *cognitive subject*, of an action and the patient, or *cognitive object*, of that action. *Identity* is a categorization of the self, a categorization conceived of as a potential or realized agreement between the subject and another. The *subject* is an 'I' which is aware of itself as the potential or realized grammatical subject of a verb or verbs expressing an action it has performed as cognitive subject.

The first implication in Bertrand's treatment of subject matter and subject is that even intransitive verbs are cognitively transitive, and passive verbs cognitively active. As soon as it is expressed as grammatical subject (by itself or another), the cognitive subject is realized as cognitive object in (say) dying or being killed as much as it is in killing.

The second implication is that to realize the self in performing an act is to realize it as a particularizing difference. For example, if I am dying or being killed in battle, I am not (say) sowing beans, and I am not *not* dying or being killed; and if I am killing in battle, I am not (say) sowing beans, I am not not killing, and I am not whom I am killing.

Third, as these examples suggest, the negation implied in difference is also implicitly (and, in *L'Appel du sol*, often explicitly) interrogation: if I am dying and not *not* dying, what does 'not dying' entail — what else could I be doing, what million things am I not doing? Who I am, dying, is also who I am, not *not* dying — not doing those million other things.

Fourth, the apparent violence done to grammar in 'Who am I dying?' is an analogue for the violence Bertrand does to what was in 1916 still the conventional relationship between author and characters, a unidirectional relationship of 'authority' whereby the author creates the characters, rather than author and characters mutually realizing one another. In more orthodox English, Bertrand *has his characters die*. By suggesting that he *dies his characters*, I mean to suggest that he apparently inserts himself, as subject asking who he is, dying, into the network of relationships between subjects whom he *has ask* who they are, dying.

For, when he wrote this book, Bertrand did know he was dying. Seriously wounded on 1 November 1914, he died on 18 November 1917. The intervening time he spent on his back in hospital beds, undergoing a succession of operations and writing books. Chief amongst these are the stories of *L'orage sur le jardin de Candide*, an essay on the Zollverein and the Allies' war aims, a one-act play for the Comédie française, poetry, *La victoire de Lorraine* (his memoirs of battle) and *L'Appel du sol*,[1] the only text for which he is at all known today. This novel shared the Goncourt with Barbusse's *Le Feu* in 1916, and was reprinted very many times during the war and the twenties. Its success is not surprising, given the date of publication and the characters' readiness to sacrifice themselves for France. I hope that applying the question 'Who am I dying?' to *L'Appel du sol* will permit a better-informed, and more just, appreciation of this complex novel than it has generally been accorded, and that readers will be encouraged to explore not only *L'Appel du sol*, but Bertrand's other, regrettably forgotten, writings as well. Because of constraints of space, the other writings will be represented by texts from *L'orage sur le jardin de Candide*.[2]

L'Appel du sol is informed by a dialectic of differentiation. The two most significant things that constitute its own difference are particularly interesting from our point of view. The first is that its themes are all variations on the theme of difference. The second is that it is itself a realization, in interrogative mode, of its author's difference as cognitive subject: this is already implicit in the narrator's manifest subjectivity (manifest notably when the narrative is conducted through metaphor and in the occasional use of first-person forms that identify the narrator as French), but it emerges clearly from a comparison of the novel with Bertrand's other texts, and it is confirmed if the circumstances in which the novel was written are taken into account. I shall look first at the major variations on the theme of difference.

One might expect a bestseller in 1916 to deal in cultural identities

[1] *L'Appel du sol* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1916). Henceforth *AS*, with page references incorporated in the text.

[2] *L'Orage sur le jardin de Candide* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, n. d. [1917]). Henceforth *OJC*, with page references incorporated in the text.

collectively accepted as self-evident. Certainly, in the narrator's view, the French soldiers are fighting a just war, the German soldiers an unjust one. However, we are not given a black-and-white presentation of the war. And, in the extreme situation of battle and death, the problem of the subject as real, present and, in its endless intersubjective growth, endlessly regressive, is painfully posed. As soon as the reader asks, with some of the characters, what a French soldier actually is, it becomes clear that the dualities of which the book is constructed are so blurred that — to take a paradigm — the relation between black and white cannot usefully be expressed as the dualistic opposition of black and white, but only as the dialectical difference between black and not-black. The significance of this blurring will become clear from analysis of some of the dualities.

A basic duality is the distinction between 'sol' [soil] and 'terre' [earth]. When the book asks 'What is a French soldier?', part of the answer is that he is fighting for 'le sol de France'. Now, in important respects, *sol* and *terre* are canonically distinct. *Sol* tends to denote conventional categories of the substance *terre*, either geological (*sols argileux* etc.) or political (*le sol français* etc.). *L'Appel de la terre* would have implied a peasant novel of some kind, not necessarily with political implications. Such distinctions are indeed preserved in Bertrand's novel. For instance, when Vaissette and Fabre come upon the cemetery, they find the bodies of German soldiers mingled with those of French people disinterred by the bombardment, and Vaissette suggests that it will soon be impossible to tell dead Frenchmen from dead Germans, as they lie in 'la terre maternelle' (*AS* 83). The term 'terre' here transcends nationality: French and Germans alike are children of Earth. Later, observing their men's attitude to the German prisoners, Vaissette says to de Quéré: 'Ils les absolvent en la profondeur de leur âme, comme la terre, qui a fait pourtant elle-même les patries, rassemble les corps de tous les ennemis dans son sein' [In their heart of hearts they absolve them, just as the earth gathers all dead enemies together into her bosom — even though earth herself is what made countries in the first place] (*AS* 287).

In these and other examples, 'terre' certainly denotes the substance earth, but also the whole planet, seen as an eternal and universal source of life that transcends national differences. Yet, in the second quotation, Vaissette says that it is the earth itself that has made 'les patries'. His use of 'pourtant' [even though] suggests that he is aware

of an element of paradox in his statement: and indeed, it is generally the word 'sol' that is associated with 'patrie' in this novel.

Nevertheless, as Vaissette's 'pourtant' implies, although 'sol' and 'terre' are *distinguishable* in the novel, it is in fact impossible to keep them *separate*. This is exemplified when Vaissette says to de Quéré: 'la puissance du sol s'est faite chair en nous' [the power of the soil has been made flesh in us] (*AS* 194). Calqued on 'le Verbe s'est fait chair' [the Word was made flesh], Vaissette's words universalize and quasi-divinize 'sol'. But these are qualities that one would expect to associate with 'terre', not 'sol'. They are all the more surprising as Vaissette does not believe in God or the spiritual (*AS* 194, 250, 272). The ambiguity of his position is reflected in something he says just before this:

> J'avais [i.e. already before the war] aussi une religion: celle de l'humanité. Et j'ai mêlé cette religion à mon culte pour la Patrie. J'ai cru que c'est pour cela que j'avais ressenti aux premières heures du danger un tel frémissement et depuis lors une si vaste tendresse pour cette terre. (*AS* 194)
>
> I too had a religion: I worshipped humanity. And I mingled this religion with my devotion to our country. I thought that was what galvanized me when danger first threatened, and why I have held this land in such deep affection ever since.

'Cette terre' here denotes two things: the substance earth that sticks to their boots, and specifically French earth, or *sol*. The reference to 'culte' [devotion, worship] gives moral, quasi-spiritual connotations to this politically French soil. Finally, Vaissette's reference to his humanist 'religion' gives 'cette terre' strong connotations of supra-national planet Earth, mother of us all. The semantic complexity of 'cette terre' in this example helps to explain Vaissette's 'pourtant', and is entirely typical of Bertrand's novel.

As Vaissette's 'pourtant' reminds us, another question arises from these considerations. Where do *patries* and frontiers come from? Are they just a manifestation of nature, like trees and streams and soldiers? For Vaissette, the soldiers are part of French soil, like the trees and streams (*AS* 187–8). This in itself asks more questions than it answers, since neither a tree nor a soldier *is* soil. The implication of this is brought out through a switch in narrative point of view whose ambiguity mirrors the ontological and moral ambiguity of what we read. The soldiers are

> inconscients de leur rôle et de sa grandeur. Ils n'ont pas plus de peine et pas plus de mérite à être la sauvegarde de la France et sa parure, que l'Ile-de-France n'a de mérite

> à s'orner de ses crépuscules et que l'Alpe ou le Rhin gallo-romains n'ont de peine à délimiter ses marches orientales. (*AS* 188–9)
>
> unaware of their role or its grandeur. It is no harder or more meritorious for them to be the protectors and the adornment of France than it is for the evening sky to adorn the Ile-de-France, or was for the Alps and the Rhine to define the eastern marches of Roman Gaul.

Like the skyscapes, the soldiers' grandeur is an adornment to France. Like the mountains and rivers, they are a rampart. Since they are *like* these natural phenomena, they are *different from* them — but seemingly just as natural, no more conscious of their function, no more deserving of praise. Here, then, another crucial distinction is blurred: is there actually any essential difference between the beauty and destructiveness of, say, a storm and the beauty and destructiveness of a battle? If a soldier is simply one more outgrowth of the natural world, and there is no merit in courage, is there any *blame* in being a coward or in committing atrocities? And can there be such a thing as a just or unjust war?

The blurring of these oppositions — between 'terre' and 'sol', self and other, human and non-human, good and evil — inevitably entails another question, central to any war novel: whom are we fighting? The opposition of French and German is the most obvious difference in the novel. But this difference is less clear than one would expect.

Inevitably, the characters do voice a number of the *topoi* of the time. Here are some examples from a discussion between Vaissette and de Quéré: the French love France for a variety of reasons, because France is diverse, whereas the Germans all love 'leur Germanie' for a single reason (*AS* 141); the French bear a torch of civilization inherited from Greece and Rome, but no Germanic tribe has ever carried it, even though modern Germany has produced outstanding scholars and chemists (*AS* 143–4); the German soul, unlike the French, with its Latin clarity, is dreamy, full of northern mists (*AS* 144); the Germans nevertheless have formidable powers of organization (*AS* 143); the French are 'les soldats de l'Idée', that is, fighting for the dominion of artists and thinkers over arms manufacturers (*AS* 146–7); victory, therefore, will go to France — a victory, in effect, for Racine and Ronsard over soldiers and ironmasters (*AS* 147).

So far, so stereotyped. But even these oppositions are blurred. It is Vaissette the southerner who refers to the northern mists in the

dreamy German soul, but it is the narrator who tells us that de Quéré is a Breton with a dreamy mist in his eyes (*AS* 133). De Quéré himself, a career soldier and devout Christian, welcomes the war because it will restore to the French the order and discipline that once were theirs in the seventeenth century, but are now the Germans' (*AS* 142–3). This suggests that some at least of these stereotypical qualities are not stable, but change sides over time. Similarly, the same Vaissette who says that the Germans have never carried the torch of civilization (*AS* 144) subsequently partly contradicts himself, in contrasting present German barbarity with the Germany that was once a centre of civilization (*AS* 284–5). A page or two later, he refers to the noble self-sacrifice and pitiable humanity that the French and German soldiers have in common, something eternal that transcends nations and enmities (*AS* 287). De Quéré takes this up, saying that, while the Germans are dying for an unjust cause, their sincerity and commitment fill him with respect and pity (*AS* 288).

It is extraordinary that, at a time when atrocity stories abounded, virtually the only evocation of German barbarity amounts to a few references by Vaissette to the intoxication of destruction and to lust for carnage (*AS* 284). There is indeed a brief account of looting: the cellar of an abandoned house is ransacked and the wine drunk — by Vaissette's own chasseurs (*AS* 108–11). On one other occasion in the novel, civilian property is said to have been 'profaned' — by the soldiers of both sides (*AS* 206–7). There is actually more reference to the 'animal' side of humanity in descriptions of French soldiers than of Germans — to their bovine passivity, to their uncomplicated need for food and rest, and so on.

It would be surprising if the novel showed no anti-German clichés. What *is* surprising is that they are so understated. The novel shows a certain even-handedness, indeed a certain generosity towards the enemy (unlike *La Victoire de Lorraine*, which refers to many instances of German barbarity). Underlying this generosity there seems to be a disquieting sense of the relativity of right and wrong in a materialist universe. It is true that de Quéré does not feel this, but Vaissette, who is prepared to go along with the slogan that the French are 'les soldats du Droit', confesses that he has no idea what Right is, and suspects that it is different on either side of the Pyrenees or the Rhine (*AS* 145–6). Later, after the momentous events of the first day on the Marne, he comes to realize that one can get anything out of a human

being (*AS* 183). He is thinking of the self-sacrifice of his men, but it is impossible not to wonder here whether what is true of 'good' is not just as true of 'evil': does not all fanaticism depend on the very quality that Vaissette has discerned in human beings? There are similar ominous implications in something he says later. Debating Christianity and humanism with de Quéré, he says that it does not matter which doctrine we live by: 'Le résultat pratique est le même, car l'âme humaine ne varie pas' [The end result is the same, for the human spirit is always essentially the same] (*AS* 259).

In important ways, then, even the opposition between French and Germans is blurred. They have qualities in common, which may in any case come and go over time. The basic thing they share is their 'humanité'. But humanity itself, as presented in this novel, consists of blurred distinctions between features that are generally considered to be opposite to, or at least very different from, one another. To see this, let us come back to the soldiers as outgrowths or manifestations of earth. Not surprisingly, this idea is supported by the many references to them as animal-like beings, unthinking, passive, reacting physically to physical stimuli, driven by instinct (e.g. *AS* 15, 163, 164, 167, 176, 195–6, 257). At the field hospital, Vaissette finds none of the 'moral beauty' he had been expecting, just the primitive simplicity of physical pain (*AS* 219). The men's physical reactions are often also collective: tension fills them *all*; the tension is released in them *all*; they *all* leap forward, like a single machine. And very often, this behaviour is defined by a character or the narrator as resignation, submission, self-sacrifice or abnegation.

However, in so far as these qualities of herd-like bovine resignation are presented through simile or metaphor, they are called into question. By definition, similarity is difference. To take an emblematic example, if the men are *like* ruminants (*AS* 15), they *are not* ruminants. The dialectic of similarity and difference is at its clearest in metaphor, as for example when Vaissette paraphrases his hero Lucretius: we are animals, but we are able to think about our animality and accept it (*AS* 259). Vaissette develops the paradox, in discussing 'résignation' with de Quéré:

> Et nous ne sommes pas différents de cette humanité passive. Vous donnez comme motif de notre résignation la doctrine qui veut l'humilité, et l'adoration des incompréhensibles volontés célestes. Je donne comme mobile de la mienne ma soumission aux lois mystérieuses du destin et de la raison. Il y aurait de la sottise à

> se révolter, de la lâcheté à se plaindre. [...] Le résultat pratique est le même, car l'âme humaine ne varie pas [...]: notre passivité. (*AS* 259)
>
> And we're no different from this passive humanity. You say our motive for resigning ourselves is the doctrine that demands humility and the worship and exaltation of God's incomprehensible will. I say the motivation behind mine is my submission to the mysterious laws of destiny and of reason. It would be stupid to rebel, cowardly to complain. The end result, our passiveness, is the same, because the human spirit is always essentially the same.

That is, Vaissette uses his reason to submit to his reason! He highlights the paradox with his use of 'mobile' [motivating force], in contrast with the 'motif' [motive] he attributes to de Quéré: just how passive *is* this implied determinism, and how determinist is the passivity? Is Vaissette's 'submission' a state of having submitted to someone or something, or of having been subjugated? Whether the verb is active or passive, there is a who or a what that is its subject, just as in any abnegation, the very act of self-denial is an act of self-affirmation.

I say 'a who or a what' because these characters do think, and think through negation and, above all, interrogation. The whole book is an enquiry into why they are fighting, into what sort of creatures can possibly be prepared to accept the sort of death that is awaiting them. Vaissette, the philosophy teacher, feels the need to understand his actions (*AS* 23), and to clarify his ideas through discussion (*AS* 70). The resignation, the refusal to think, are fundamentally ambiguous. The distinctions between submission and assertion, resignation and questioning, body and mind, reflex and freedom, are progressively blurred.

A similar osmosis takes place between collective and individual. As we have seen, there are many references to collective emotion, and to the soldiers as instruments of a force greater than themselves — the 'will of the soil', the 'Patrie', etc. But all the soldiers who are named by name are presented as individuals, each with his characteristic traits. This individuality is seen clearly and ironically in the presentation of military discipline in the novel. The officers may control their men like a machine (*AS* 164, 176, 200), but strict discipline can have surprising results, as when Vaissette volunteers to act as a messenger. Running through the bullets, he takes Fabre's message to the captain and, conditioned by his training, stands to attention and salutes him. The captain roars at him to drop to the ground and crawl back, not run. But Vaissette stays on his feet, runs back and delivers the reply to

Fabre. Only then does he realize that he has done something 'très beau' [beautiful] (*AS* 13–14). Was this act one of courage, or of stupidity, or of both? Did he even know what he was doing? All that is certain is that, by obeying one rule (standing to attention), he disobeys another (compliance with an order). Yet, it is implied, he is a hero. Oppositions crucial to military effectiveness, between obedience and disobedience, *sang froid* and impulse, efficiency and blunder, dissolve in the imprecise, affective judgment that Vaissette's act is 'très beau'. The ironic ambiguities of this episode are emblematic of the blurring of distinctions that characterizes *L'Appel du sol.* So too are the conversations in which the soldiers can never decide whether victory is determined by military skill or by sheer chance (e.g. *AS* 73–8).

Not surprisingly, there are multiple such osmoses in the very notion of *patrie* in the novel. The question of how history, culture, geology and blood relate to each other is repeatedly raised, but never resolved. The action even takes place in four different areas, ensuring that the mysterious relation between France and the diversity of its provinces, with their different climates and crops and mutually incomprehensible dialects, is drawn to the reader's attention.

The terms of each of the dualities I have been looking at leach into one another. The response to each question is just another question. Opposition becomes asymmetric, an infinite regression, multiple difference between (say) tree and not-tree. Is the book therefore disorderly, the failure of a dying man to think clearly? Or does it show order, a measured view of complex issues? The opposition of order and disorder, measure and un-measure, is actually another of the book's main themes. For de Quéré, the army has 'l'ordonnance des jardins de Versailles' [the orderliness of the gardens at Versailles] (*AS* 133). His literary heroes are from Ancient Rome and the *grand siècle.* He welcomes the war as a means of restoring seventeenth-century values in France. He says to Fabre and Vaissette that, in order to possess lasting power, a state must have classical, measured order (*AS* 142). Vaissette, too, has Racine, Ronsard and the Ancients among his literary heroes. As a result, the extreme opposition of pious Christianity (de Quéré) and materialist humanism (Vaissette) is blurred through the two characters' common taste for measure. This is significant, for two reasons: first, because the blurring comes over as an orderly, measured balance between two extremes, and second, because measure is something that, rightly or wrongly, the French

have traditionally seen as characteristic of their culture.

The thematic even-handedness and the stylistic restraint of *L'Appel du sol* certainly embody the French ideal of *mesure*. In fact, stylistic restraint is itself a theme in the novel. Vaissette, whose own *furia francese* in battle is not in doubt (e.g. *AS* 13–14, 166–8), scorns writers who fill the *Bulletin des Armées* with their gushings (*AS* 147), and dismisses journalists who glorify war as if it were some literary epic (*AS* 77–8). In similar vein, Fabre says that dying soldiers think only of their pain: it is only in books that they voice noble thoughts (*AS* 138). This is harrowingly confirmed for Vaissette when he visits the field hospital (*AS* 219). The characters' own stylistic restraint is well seen when Fabre addresses his men before they go into action on the Marne: through the intonation, rhythm and impact of his simple words is heard the imperious call of the soil of France (*AS* 124–6).

What is true of Fabre's words is true of *L'Appel du sol* itself: style is as important as what is said. Indeed, as the title suggests, language is a central theme in the novel. Two short examples will show the significance of this for *Subject Matters*. First, the closing lines of the novel. Vaissette's throat fills with blood, but he manages to enquire after Fabre and de Quéré. Both have been killed:

> Il répéta, dans son sourire:
> — Tués...
> Il ajouta:
> — Moi aussi.
> Son dernier regard s'était éteint. Il eut un râle et un dernier frisson de tout le corps. Il put rouvrir les yeux. Il fit un effort. Alors, il murmura, en les fermant à jamais:
> — Mais la France continue!... (*AS* 302)

> He said again, through his smile:
> 'Killed...'
> He added:
> 'And me.'
> His eyes had died to the light. He gave a choke, and a shudder went right through him. He managed to open his eyes again. Then, with an effort, as he shut them for ever, he murmured:
> 'But France lives on...'

Vaissette's dying words are typically polyvalent. First, they are an instance of the fine words that Fabre has dismissed as belonging only in literature (*AS* 138), and which Vaissette himself did not hear at the field hospital: unlike those wounded men, Vaissette 'talks like a

book', in effect remythologizing what he and especially Fabre had demythologized. This is just the last of the many contradictions, half-contradictions and qualifications that blur so many oppositions in the novel. Second, in this last line of the book, we are no nearer knowing what France actually is. Thanks to the 'mais', we know there is a difference between France and Vaissette; otherwise, France is as inscrutable as ever, simply the subject of 'continue'. Third, while it is unambiguously Vaissette and no one else who is dying, we are no nearer knowing who or what he is than we were at the start. Fourth, it is significant that, before his last words, Vaissette does not say 'Je meurs' [I'm dying]. Instead, he is told that Fabre and de Quéré have been killed, and simply says: 'Moi aussi' [Me too]. This atemporal sentence, with its disjunctive pronoun, brings out that the dying Vaissette is doubly inactive: both medically and grammatically. He is nothing more, and nothing less, than the subject of an implied passive verb of state: '[Moi aussi] je suis tué' [[Me too,] I am killed]. Yet, as the subjectivity of 'aussi' shows, this undefined and nearly extinguished Vaissette is still an active cognitive subject, thinking, assessing, judging: 'aussi' draws an explicit comparison between de Quéré and Vaissette. This subjectivity is confirmed by Vaissette's 'Mais'. Any conjunction would have done this, but, of all the conjunctions in the French language, 'mais' is the simplest and clearest possible encapsulation of the theme of difference as negation and interrogation. In effect, when Vaissette says 'Moi aussi. Mais la France continue', he is saying: 'Am I dying? Yes, I am dying. Do I think France is dying? No!' The word 'mais' perfectly expresses the relation between Vaissette's existence and that of France — comparative, contrastive, interrogative, negative, subjective, real, and forever regressive.

Unlike Vaissette, of course, France is not a cognitive subject. But the soldiers only seem able to relate to France *as if it were* a person (e.g. *AS* 125–6). It is no such thing, of course — except metaphorically. The narrator in effect compares the nation to a person, the soil to a person, and, therefore, the nation to the soil. But comparison is subjective. Just as Vaissette realizes himself as subject in his 'Mais', the narrator is constantly present as subject in the similes and metaphors through which the narrative and description are realized. This presence is reinforced through the variations in narrative point of view, which are themselves often highlighted through the inbuilt subjectivity of discourse connectives.

Not only is comparison subjective, but resemblance is difference. The closest the narrator can get to grasping France or any of these men is by invoking things they are like, but are not. They are *like* one another, *like* the Germans, *like* unthinking animals, *like* the rocks and rivers and twilights; they are *as if* born of the soil, made from it but distinct from it; they experience their patriotism *like* a call from the soil; and the call, as a linguistic sign, is *like* them and *like* France, a tension between concrete and abstract. And, of course, the narrator is *like* the men, in that they themselves can only proceed through comparisons.

Now, in so far as there is no resemblance that is not an *expressed* resemblance, all resemblances are irreversible: to say a soldier is like a river is not the same as to say a river is like a soldier. This is why the 'self' and 'identity' of any of these soldiers are infinitely regressive: not only does a relation have no substance, but even any metaphorical substance it is given is fluid. The source or author of relations and of their metaphorical substance — that is, the mind that realizes them — is the *subject*. And, in so far as the subject is only knowable through analogy, as the subject of the verb, it is both indubitable and itself infinitely regressive: beyond question, yet existing only as negating and questioning.

A brief look at *L'Orage sur le jardin de Candide* shows that this conclusion applies as much to Bertrand as to Vaissette and the others.

The first of these stories is 'De la pluie qui surprit Candide en son jardin et d'un entretien qu'il eut avec divers personnages'. Candide, who is immortal (*OJC* 12), is enjoying his garden one day in 1914, when a terrible storm — the Great War — ruins it. Taking shelter, he is joined by Don Quixote, Mr Pickwick, Achilles, Faust, Anatole France's Jérôme Coignard and... Vaissette. The characters themselves realise that, as literary figures, they are emblems of humanity, of every country and every age (*OJC* 33). But Don Quixote speaks of his 'friend Cervantes' (*OJC* 33), and Vaissette says, of the men killed in action in the world outside fiction, that their spirits and minds create the 'atmosphère spirituelle' of the world (*OJC* 41). Clearly, if literary characters are part of this 'spiritual atmosphere', it is because they are expressions of the 'spirits and minds' of the writers who created them. It is significant, however, that it is not the writers who discuss the war, but their characters: the writers' spirits and minds are mediated through their fiction.

Bertrand stresses this through his presentation of Vaissette. In a preface, the narrator tells us that Vaissette, the antimilitarist (*OJC* 46) fighting to keep the language of Racine and Voltaire from extinction (*OJC* 51), was planning a thesis on 'sequels' of Voltaire's *Candide* when he was killed. A footnote refers us here to *L'Appel du sol*, bracketing it with a number of fictional works inspired by *Candide* (*OJC* 5). This inserts *L'Appel du sol* at the outset into a web of intertextuality, which of course rapidly becomes intercultural and ever vaster as the various characters make their entrance. This is not all, however: Vaissette is visibly acquiring the status of exemplary myth that most of the other characters have long had. It is as if Bertrand has recreated him to make him more comprehensively representative of the poilu of 1917.

Within Bertrand's fictional story, the characters are living people to one another, but they know of one another's pasts through the literary works that gave them life. For Candide, of course, Vaissette is different – a newly killed soldier from outside fiction. But Bertrand's reader has been forcefully reminded of Vaissette's fictionality, and is actually witnessing his putative entry into legend and myth. The implication is that the deeds *outside* literature of a million anonymous poilus are to win immortality through the deeds *in* literature of their fictional analogue, Vaissette.

One reason why Bertrand's writings are so moving is that, for his readers, standing outside his fictional world, it is not only Vaissette's putative entry into myth that they are witnessing, but Bertrand's own. It is as if, in creating the two versions of Vaissette, the slowly dying Bertrand has given himself two surrogate deaths, in two attempts to explain and accept his own. Indeed, there is a third: in *L'Appel du sol*, many details of the defence of the river crossing are closely modelled on Bertrand's account, in *La Victoire de Lorraine*, of the operation in which he sustained his fatal wound.

All these ironies and complexities recur in 'Les animaux sous la tourmente', the last part of *L'Orage sur le jardin de Candide*, most concentratedly in the extraordinary 'Les Aventures du rat de ville'. This fable draws on four of La Fontaine's, and also alludes to Virgil and Homer. It also belongs in the tradition of Swift, Montesquieu and Voltaire, using outsiders (the rats) to comment on the absurdities of human behaviour. However, the basic allegory engenders only passionate confusion: rats represent human beings; human beings

represent the gods. So is war absurd? If it is, why the attack on neutrality? Why should rats take sides in battles between gods? The town rat is not a god, and so does not have perfect wisdom, only feelings and partial insights. Hence, no doubt, his inconsistency: as he says, he cannot help being neutral, yet at the same time he is *not* neutral, even though he does not know who he wants to win (*OJC* 285)! The lesson, he concludes, is that the rats should be prepared for future wars with the cats, for there will always be war (*OJC* 285). The rats, like the men in *L'Appel du sol* and 'De la pluie...', are cultural constructs as well as flesh and blood, but this does not help them understand the meaning of war. Like all allegories, Bertrand's depends on resemblance and difference: rats are *like* humans; humans are *like* gods; gods are like... what? And what about the cats? The asymmetry of allegory, like that of all comparison, is itself *like* the cognitive subject, at once there and ever elusive, fixed and ever-changing.

The conclusion is that, even if the cognitive subject is an infinite regression, even if it can only be grasped as analogous to the grammatical subject of utterances denoting its acts, it is no less real for that: it is 'the very one'. Vaissette, dying, knows this: his is the very throat that fills with blood; he, and no one else, is the very one who says 'Mais la France continue'. And Bertrand, the very one who dies' Vaissette, knows it too: his subject-matter and his subjects matter, because, dying, he would be a different subject without them; and they matter to his reader, who, without them, would have been a different subject.

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PLURAL AUTHORSHIP IN AUTOMATIC WRITING

Born under the sign of Janus, part commonplace, part *terra incognita*, the plural author appears as an avatar, or perhaps a ghost, of the Author-as-such. Within surrealist studies, the oft-noted coincidence of automatism and collective creation has remained very much an open question, while within authorship studies, whether geared towards Roland Barthes's singularly 'dead' author or towards the reborn diversity of Michel Foucault's 'author functions', the question of the plural author has remained secondary.[1]

The notion of the plural author can range from collective creation to putting one's signature to a text one has not necessarily written. The 'generic' poet of ancient Greece who gathers several anonymous poets under a single name is a different case from Marx and Engels, whose case differs in turn from that of Willy signing the works of Colette. But whatever creative or editorial operations it results from, and whether the community it embodies is avowed or inadmissible, private or political, real or symbolic, the plural author appears as a dissident in relation to the official figure of the Author. This is no doubt why it remains as problematic for us as literary anonymity: we can accept it only as an exception to the rule.[2] Depriving the Author of its upper-case majesty, plurality significantly reduces the writer's chances of going down in history. Louis Aragon and Elsa Triolet may have collaborated to produce their 'œuvres croisées' [hybrid works], but they are better known for what they did apart. Does anyone remember Labiche's collaborators? The plural author is under

[1] See Roland Barthes, 'La Mort de l'auteur' (1968), in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Eric Marty, 3 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1993-95), II, pp. 491–5; and Michel Foucault, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?' (1969), in *Dits et écrits*, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), I, pp. 789–821.

[2] See Foucault, ibid., p. 800: 'L'anonymat littéraire ne nous est pas supportable; nous ne l'acceptons qu'à titre d'énigme.'

constant threat of erasure, not just from the return of singularity but from plurality itself, as when individuals find themselves subsumed into groups of signatories: a frequent occurrence in the abundant polemical literature of the surrealist movement. Thus does the created devour its creators. Is not Fantômas far more familiar to us than Souvestre and Allain? And, in publishing contracts, aren't all authors, including plural authors, legally regarded in the singular?

Collaboration not only meets stiff resistance, it also tends to be discontinuous. While stable unions can and do make it into the tradition of authors — the Goncourt brothers, Erckmann-Chatrian, Boileau and Narcejac — less durable links form what Georges Bataille called 'secondary communities', or what Alain Jouffroy, referring to the collective creations of surrealism, has termed 'a secret society of writing' on the margins of the literary institution.[3] Manifestos, tracts, open letters, and other forms of militant literature 'in the service of the revolution', whether poetic or political, are all easily conjugated in the plural, so that the plural author quickly comes to connote rupture, marginality, and innovation: in a word, modernity, understood as that which is at once destructive and foundational. From this perspective, given an ideological context echoing throughout the early decades of the twentieth century with Lautréamont's injunction that 'la poésie doit être faite par tous, non par un' [poetry must be made by all, not by one], it is hardly surprising that, in the wake of various simultaneist experiments, surrealism should appear as the golden age of collective creation.

The founding text of the surrealist movement, *Les Champs magnétiques*, is itself the work of a 'two-headed author'. Shortly after the First World War, and just months after the death of Guillaume Apollinaire, *the* poet of the time, two young members of the *Littérature* group, each with one collection of poems already to his name, found themselves at a loose end. They were about to join the Dada movement when, in the Spring of 1919, they undertook to 'noircir du papier avec un louable mépris de ce qui s'en suivrait littérairement' [to blacken some paper with praiseworthy contempt for what might come of it in literary terms], as Breton was famously to put it some years later in the 1924 *Manifeste du surréalisme*.

[3] Alain Jouffroy, 'Société secrète de l'écriture', *Change*, 7 (special no. on 'Le groupe, la rupture'), 1970, 30–45.

During the movement's first ten years, the history of 'pure psychic automatism' was at one with that of surrealism. Though plentiful and varied, automatic productions continued on the whole to bear the hallmark established by *Les Champs magnétiques*, which I shall associate here with *Ralentir travaux* (1930) in particular, due to a number of similarities connecting the two texts. The former was written just before the first *Manifeste du surréalisme*, the latter soon after the second. Both were conceived in a context of break-up, arising in 1919 from the desire to found something new (beyond cubism and dadaism), and in 1930 to rebuild surrealism itself, shaken as it then was by internal unrest. In embarking on *Ralentir travaux* with Paul Eluard and René Char, Breton, who had recently been attacked by the 'Cadavre' group, was once more mingling his voice with those of his friends, now a threesome rather than a pair, but with the same commitment to carrying forward the surrealist adventure on the strength of a shared discourse.

The fact that collaboration plays such an unprecedented role in the collective writings of surrealism leads us to inquire into the nature of the affinity thereby established between an unusual form of authorship and a novel mode of writing. Barthes takes care not to dissociate one from the other when he places surrealism among the enterprises that have contributed to 'desacralizing' the image of the Author.[4] Limiting the notion of collaboration to 'the systematic fusion of the thoughts of two or more authors within one and the same work',[5] Max Ernst relates collective creation to the aesthetics of collage, inviting us to consider the plural author not as a simple paradigm of anecdotal figures but rather as a heuristic form representing the plurality of voices, positions, or egos to be found at work in the tenacious fantasy of the singular Author.

Forgetting the Author

There exists a clear link between the originally dadaist refusal to produce something 'literary' and the questioning of the traditional status of the author as a plenary, founding subject, master and possessor of his work (his *œuvre*). The 'disinterested play of thought'

[4] Barthes, op. cit., p. 492.

[5] Max Ernst, *Au-delà de la peinture*, quoted by Jean-Paul Clébert, *Dictionnaire du Surréalisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1996), p. 157.

at the basis of automatism as defined by Breton in the 1924 *Manifesto* implies a corresponding 'disinterested I of the author' who relates to his 'work' (a term henceforth kept at a distance) as to something unknown, and whose relation *qua* scriptor to the verbal event of writing is not specular but speculative in so far as he finds himself a witness or bystander as much as a participant:

> Nous remplissons des pages de cette écriture sans sujet: nous regardons s'y produire des faits que nous n'avons même pas rêvés, s'y opérer les alliages les plus mystérieux; nous avançons comme dans un conte de fées.[6]
>
> We fill whole pages with this subject-less writing: we observe facts/deeds taking place that we have not even dreamt of, we see the most mysterious combinations occurring; we move forward as in a fairy-tale.

The rule of the greatest possible speed, designed to incapacitate critical reason, equally has the effect of disorientating the author who no longer has time to recognize himself, let alone recognize what he is creating. Thus is accomplished the 'passage from *subject* to *object*'[7] underlying automatism. 'Subject-less writing' — Breton speaks also of the 'eclipse of the subject'[8] — is to be understood as a writing not governed from the outside, whether by a preliminary representation of meaning or by an authorial intention. Only then will 'fairy-tales' be born from 'facts' or 'deeds' (*faits*), as much through the conductive magic of the homophone signifier as through the principle of non-contradiction between dream (*fées*) and reality (*faits*), destined to become one of the founding principles of theoretical surrealism in the first *Manifesto*.

The title of the opening section of *Les Champs magnétiques*, 'La Glace sans tain' [The Two-Way Mirror], emblematizes the lure of the narcissistic image and the need to pass through the reflection towards the 'disturbing conjunctures' and 'dangerous landscapes'[9] that become visible to the author who can forget the author: 'Il faut effacer le reflet de la personnalité pour que l'inspiration bondisse à

[6] André Breton, from notes written in 1920–21, *Inédits II*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Marguerite Bonnet, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibl. de la Pléiade, 1988–92), I, p. 620.

[7] From a copy of *Les Champs magnétiques* annotated by Breton in 1930. See *Œuvres complètes*, I, p. 1129.

[8] Ibid., p. 1129.

[9] Ibid., pp. 1128–9.

tout jamais du miroir' [The reflection of personality must be erased in order to allow inspiration to leap once and for all out of the mirror].[10] The automatic text bears the trace of this urge to abolish narcissistic speech, as evidenced for example in the accumulated negations at the very start of *Les Champs magnétiques*:

> Prisonniers des gouttes d'eau, nous ne sommes que des animaux perpétuels. Nous courons dans les villes sans bruit et les affiches enchantées ne nous touchent plus. A quoi bon ces grands enthousiasmes fragiles, ces sauts de joie desséchés? Nous ne savons plus rien que les astres morts...[11]
>
> Imprisoned in drops of water, we are but perpetual animals. We run through silent towns and the enchanted posters no longer touch us. What use are these great fragile enthusiasms, these dried-out leaps of joy? The only knowledge left to us is that of dead stars...

On the manuscript, the first sentence read thus: 'Prisonnier des gouttes d'eau nous ne sommes...' 'Prisonnier' only became a plural noun when the text went to print — not the only precious trace of the creative process to be erased in the name of grammatical and orthographic normality. The passage from singular to plural in the space of just a few words gives a measure of the extremely brief time for hesitation allowed in the enunciative process. Soupault, for it happened to be him, came down on the side of 'we' only a short moment after the initial impetus. The return to the singular is by no means excluded, however, and, where the texts join up, the first person reappears:

> Nous touchons à la fin du Carême. Mon [Notre] squelette transparaît comme un arbre à travers les aurores successives de ma [la] chair où les désirs d'enfant dorment à poings fermés. Ma [La] faiblesse est extrême. Hier encore je glissais [nous glissions] sur des écorces merveilleuses en passant devant les merceries.[12]
>
> We're coming to the end of Lent. My [Our] skeleton[s] show[s] like a tree through the successive dawns of my [the] flesh where the desires of children sleep, their fists clenched. [My] weakness is extreme. Only yesterday I was [we were] sliding on marvellous barks of trees on the way past the haberdasheries.

[10] From Eluard's preface to *Ralentir travaux*, ed. by Jean-Claude Mathieu (Paris: Corti, 1989), pp. 7–24 (p. 29).

[11] André Breton and Philippe Soupault, *Les Champs magnétiques* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. Poésie, 1971), p. 27.

[12] The text reproduced here is that of the manuscript, with the changes made by Breton during the preparation of the book between square brackets.

Going by the title of the last poem of *Ralentir travaux*, 'Je m'écoute encore parler' [I still listen to myself speaking], the tension in automatic writing between collective and individual enunciation had still not abated over ten years on from *Les Champs magnétiques*.

The Real Functioning of the Author

The figure of the doubled author is by no means new, for poetic tradition is steeped in the imaginary of an *I* crossed by an other, inhabited for example by the voice of the muses or of the world itself. Once remapped onto a self doubled into two voices (of the conscious and the unconscious), however, inspiration establishes between the elements of the doubling a relation of strangeness which repels known forms, transforming the Hugolian 'bouche d'ombre' [mouth of shadow] into a highly surrealist 'vache d'ombre' [cow of shadow]. What difference now between the one who speaks within me and the one who writes at my side? Might not the plural author embody the real functioning of the author just as automatism is meant to capture what Breton calls 'le fonctionnement réel de la pensée' [the real functioning of thought]? For whosoever undertakes to write with the thought of losing himself in the other of his self, the self of his other exteriorizes alterity and prevents speech from getting bogged down in the sands of personal lyricism. In the image of the automat, the plural author is to be understood as 'an objectification of the principle of doubling'.[13] The founding image of 'l'homme coupé en deux par la fenêtre' [the man cut in two by the window] in the first *Manifesto*, originally encountered by Breton in a state of half-sleep, is also a metaphor of the author. This was the sense invoked by Aragon when, some fifty years later, he used this image as the title of an important article, thereby underlining the analogy between the 'two-headed author' and 'the man cut in two'.

We are now in a better position to understand the value set on the alliance of automatic writing with the plural author, the latter falling in behind the principle of the impersonal work once writing itself comes to be conceived no longer as a possession but, to use Breton's formula in his 1933 essay 'Le Message automatique', as a 'common heri-

[13] Michel Murat, 'Jeux de l'automatisme', *Une Pelle au vent dans les sables du rêve: Les écritures automatiques*, ed. by Michel Murat and Marie-Paule Berranger (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1992), pp. 5–25, p. 14.

tage'.[14] In erasing the borderlines of literary property, collaboration implies the symbolic adoption or recognition of the automatic message, be it one's own or the other's. Soupault recalls the scriptors' shared desire not to distinguish what each wrote: 'nous avions volontairement "brouillé les pistes". Nous avions décidé de ne pas préciser ce qui était de Breton et ce qui était de Soupault' [we had deliberately confused things. We had decided not to specify what was Breton's and what Soupault's].[15] Such intent valorizes 'dialogue', considered by Breton in the first *Manifesto* to be the form to which surrealist language most readily adapts. Understood in a broad sense, 'dialogue' embraces the *poèmes-conversations* of *Ralentir travaux* as well as the automatic dialogues in 'Barrières' and the 'sketch' *Vous m'oublierez* (1920), which prolongs the experiment of *Les Champs magnétiques* in theatrical form. In each case, the common denominator involves 'maximizing the misunderstandings of conversation'[16] by prioritizing the signifier over the referent:

> — Vous voulez rire? Le mercredi des Cendres est un beau jour pour les cochers, mais, si vous insistez nous irons dans ces rues sans lune où de charmantes ardeurs sont de mise.
>
> — Je ne sais pas où vous voulez m'entraîner. Je me défie un peu de vos pelures d'oranges comme autant de petits arcs-en-ciel que vous avez fait tomber dans les cours.
>
> — Ce sont des Arcs de Triomphe et vous pouvez jouer au cerceau.[17]
>
> 'Are you joking? Ash Wednesday is a fine day for coachmen, but, if you insist, we'll go down those moonless streets where charming ardours are the order of the night.'
>
> 'I don't know where you'll lead me to with all this. I don't really trust your orange peel like so many little rainbows you've dropped into the courtyards.'
>
> 'But they're great arches and you'll be able to play around with your hoop.'

Added to the discontinuity of speech, the speed of dialogical exchange favours an exercise of memory that is in and of the immediate present, less a memory of discourse as such than of words, invoked to

[14] André Breton, 'Le Message automatique', in *Œuvres complètes*, II, pp. 373–92 (p. 387).

[15] Philippe Soupault, *Mémoires de l'oubli: 1914–1923* (Paris: Lachenal & Ritter, 1981), p. 79. Not until 1982, when the original manuscript finally turned up, was this confusion sorted out.

[16] 'Porter au plus haut point le malentendu de la conversation': Breton, from the annotated copy of *Les Champs magnétiques*, *Œuvres complètes*, I, p. 1158.

[17] 'Barrières', in *Les Champs magnétiques*, pp. 61–73 (p. 72).

keep the utterance moving forward, whether by way of paradigms ('arcs-en-ciel'/'Arcs de Triomphe'), semantic contiguities ('cour' calling up 'jouer' via the sense of the former as playground, not just courtyard), or secret allusions ('cochers' calling up 'pelures d'oranges' via a line of Soupault from a contemporaneous poem: 'au rendez-vous des cochers l'apéritif est orangé' [at the coachmen's rendezvous, the aperitifs are orangy]), while 'lune', 'pelures d'orange', 'arcs', and 'cerceau' all conjugate an image of roundness. Elsewhere, notably in *Ralentir travaux*, the same process takes the form of enunciation itself becoming the subject of the utterance, as when the chance occurrences of verbal exchange follow the 'fatal accidents' and 'dangerous bends' of the Vaucluse roads, far from the straight and narrow.

Writing Together, For Better or For Worse

Aragon considers that it was only by exploring together that Philippe Soupault and André Breton were able to 'move along a road where none had gone before them'. He thus underlines the decisive role of the plural author in the adventure of writing:

> C'est une exploration de la nuit des abîmes où un homme seul n'aurait pu se risquer, où les épouvantes et les merveilles auraient tourné la tête d'un solitaire, l'auraient fait vaciller dans le gouffre.[18]
>
> Theirs is an exploration of the darkness of the abyss where a man alone could not have risked going, where horrors and wonders would have gone straight to the head of any solitary individual and left him wavering at the edge of a precipice.

Collaboration heightens the euphoria of this experience while checking its more pernicious effects. The presence of the *alter ego* facilitates the limit-experience by encouraging incursions into the unknown, but at the same time reduces the attendant risks of depersonalization by virtue of the other's structuring presence. Conceived as a writing capable of 'changing life', the practice of automatism also affects the scriptors, who experience it now as a form of liberating metamorphosis (Soupault speaks of 'euphoria' and the 'rapture of discovery', Breton of a 'state of grace'), now as a threat to their sanity (both poets claiming to have undergone hallucinations). These mixed feelings of euphoric deliverance and mortal danger

[18] Louis Aragon, 'L'Homme coupé en deux', *L'Œuvre poétique*, 15 vols (Paris: Livre Club Diderot, 1974), II, pp. 11–52 (p. 26).

forcibly express the double postulation of automatism towards 'la vraie vie' [true life] on the one hand and the experience of death on the other:

> Je ne crois pas exagérer en disant que rien ne pouvait plus durer. Quelques chapitres de plus, écrits à une vitesse v''''' (beaucoup plus grande que v'') et sans doute ne serais-je pas, maintenant, à me pencher sur cet exemplaire.[19]
>
> Believe me I'm not exaggerating when I say that things couldn't go on that way any longer. A few more chapters written at the speed of v''''' (far faster than v'') and I've no doubt I wouldn't be here now, poring over this copy of the book.

If Breton referred to *Les Champs magnétiques* as a 'dangerous book', and if both authors envisaged their own eclipse as the logical outcome of the experience, it is for the good reason that automatism seemed to them a form of suicide. Suicide was a kind of project they had fostered, as Aragon recalls when retracing the 'happening' that was due to serve as the climax to *S'il vous plaît*, a 'recurrence of *Les Champs*' in the form of a play:

> Il n'y aurait pas de quatrième acte à proprement parler. Le rideau se lèverait sur les auteurs qui publiquement écriraient leurs noms sur des papiers pliés, jetteraient ceux-ci dans un chapeau, et y tireraient au sort qui des deux sur l'instant allait se loger une balle de revolver dans la tête.[20]
>
> There was to be no fourth act as such. The curtain would rise over the two authors publicly writing their names on folded sheets of paper, throwing them into a hat, and drawing lots to see which of the two would, without any further ado, shoot himself in the head.

Beyond the eminently dadaist character of this *acte manqué*, one is struck by the image of an author almost committing an act which, given the egalitarianism of plural authorship, should logically have been collective. The anecdote brings out all the ambivalence attached to the plural author: a figure of happy alterity when favouring access to the 'unknowable' and repairing the narcissistic loss inherent to a 'subject-less' writing; but one of unhappy alteration when the other threatens the integrity of one's personality, or (possibly) one's future emergence as Author.

[19] See Breton, *Œuvres complètes*, I, p. 1172 (an annotation by Breton).

[20] Aragon, 'L'Homme coupé en deux', p. 45.

Reader before Author

If automatism appears as a 'subject-less' writing, how does the non-subject of writing become an author? By what procedures do the scriptors involved come to assume parental responsibility for their writing?

In the beginning was the reader — or, rather, a set of reader-functions constitutive of automatism. On either flank of the creative process, reading, diffracted into various operations, seems to be barely distinguishable from writing. The scriptor in receipt of a 'dictée magique' [magic dictation] is in fact a transcriber, i.e. a reader in the acoustic sense of the term, as Breton himself underlines in the first *Manifesto* with his metaphor of the 'recording apparatus', used to describe the operation whereby a 'continuous sequence of sound images' is reproduced. The postulated simultaneity of thought and writing places reading *qua* transmission at the very source of the creative process, a dynamic carried over onto the level of collaboration whenever the writing of the second author is triggered by his reading of the first:

> Face à face nous procédions à un dialogue écrit. L'un de nous lisait à haute voix ce qu'il venait d'écrire rapidement et l'autre y répondait sans réfléchir à l'instant même par écrit.[21]
>
> Sitting face to face, we would set out on a written dialogue. One of us would read aloud what he had just quickly written, and the other would instantly and spontaneously respond in writing.

This mode of composition adopted for certain automatic productions such as the dialogues of 'Barrières' and the conversation-poems of *Ralentir travaux*, applies equally to longer, successively written texts to the degree that reading (oral or silent: testimonies differ on this point) sets off further writing. The plural author who takes on the double function of reader and scriptor, whether within himself or in his relation to his collaborator, ends up as both source and destination of the automatic message. Surprised by the results they obtain, results '*foreign* to each of the two authors',[22] the scriptors share with the reader the enigma of the automatic message.

[21] Philippe Soupault, from an interview with Serge Fauchereau, *Digraphe*, 32 (June 1983), p. 21.

[22] Aragon, 'L'Homme coupé en deux', p. 26.

The Reader-Author

That the reader-function is an original and not secondary figure, that it replaces the author-function in the very process of creation, implies by extension that the second reader, corresponding to ourselves, might in turn become an author by virtue of this interchangeability of creative agencies proper to the automatic message. The same is implied by the mode of production of these writings, so that a product which appears to completely ignore or exclude the reader is in fact driven by a process which aims to transform reader into writer. How? By contagion or unconscious imitation, as Aragon envisages it:

> Je voudrais qu'on parcoure ces pages comme je les ai entendues. Au moins. Car je n'ose dire comme elles furent écrites. [...] Je voudrais qu'on lise *Les Champs magnétiques* comme le voyageur ne conteste jamais ce qu'il voit par les fenêtres des trains, les hublots des bolides. Laissez-vous mener. Nous n'avons plus l'âge du pourquoi.[23]
>
> I would like these pages to be read the way they were heard. At least. For I dare not say how they were written. [...] I would like *Les Champs magnétiques* to be read the way the traveller never contests what he sees through his train window or the high-speed portholes of the future. Go with the flow. We're past asking questions.

Invited to read the automatic text with the same mind-set as that demanded of the scriptor (receptivity, enraptured passivity, reduced critical activity), the reader exchanges his/her traditional role as addressee of the text for that of co-author. By virtue of a reciprocal conception of author and reader, the latter's reading espouses the movement of production of writing and thereby takes over from the surrealist voice: to a non-intentional writing there must ideally correspond a non-interpretative reading. The message's irreducibility thus becomes the proof, as well as the condition, of the vitality of automatism. Quoting a short passage from *Les Champs magnétiques* ('Raide tige de Suzanne inutilité surtout village de saveurs avec une église de homard' [Suzanne's stiff stalk uselessness above all village of tastes with a lobster church]), Aragon jubilantly comments:

> Dieu merci, le Champollion de ces hiéroglyphes-là n'est pas encore à naître! Longtemps encore, le père de famille en détournera les regards de sa progéniture.[24]

[23] Op. cit., pp. 30–31.

[24] Ibid., p. 30.

> Mercifully the decipherer of these particular hieroglyphics is not even about to be born! For some time yet, the father of the family will be seeing to it that his progeny look away from them.

Thus projected onto the image of the author, the receptive reader is drawn in to a fusional reading which, whilst promising immediate access to 'l'évidence poétique' [the poetically self-evident], dooms her to the non-productive stereotype of a reading modelled on writing. In postulating the absence of any frontier between self and other, whether in the scriptor's intrasubjective relation to self, in the intersubjective dynamic of authorial collaboration, or in the generation of a like reader, automatism takes the form of 'an indefinitely narcissistic expansion'.[25] The return of narcissism in the undifferentiated form of the collective is, paradoxically, the price to be paid for a writing that sought to be impersonal. Wherever transference is at work, there can be no real access to alterity, no intervening third party, no authority, and therefore no author (whether of a text or of a reading), only a writing by contagion. This zero-degree of author and reader resulting from automatism leads to an aporia when the indefinite author, this 'quelque chose qui n'avait pas plus de visage que de nom' [something as faceless as it was nameless],[26] becomes the infinite author perpetuating himself in and as the anonymous reader.

The Return of the Author

Things might have stayed this way, such that we critical readers would not be here talking about them, for lack of any author or work to discuss, had not an authorial will and a desire to bequeath a finished work made themselves heard through a kind of return of the repressed. Soupault has divulged that, when he and Breton first reread their automatic texts, they did not know how to judge them.[27] At the moment of re-reading, then, the question of the author resurfaced for the scriptors in another guise. It is known that Aragon was the first reader, in the full sense of the term, to whom the text of *Les Champs*

[25] Laurent Jenny, 'L'Automatisme comme mythe rhétorique', *Une Pelle au vent*, op. cit., pp.27–32 (p. 31).

[26] Aragon, 'L'Homme coupé en deux', p. 18.

[27] Philippe Soupault, *Vingt mille et un jours: Entretiens avec Serge Fauchereau* (Paris: Belfond, 1980), p. 64.

magnétiques was submitted, and that his enthusiastic approval was the deciding factor in its publication. The third musketeer has evoked his friends' uncertainty, indeed their readiness to destroy whole pages of their text, with Breton reported as insisting that nothing could be considered final until he, Aragon, had pronounced his view.[28] Never was a work so completely subject to the approval of a reader empowered to reintroduce the law by determining value. Fearing that Aragon's endorsement might spring too much from friendship, our two co-authors short on authority turned to the critical spirit of the sharp-witted Théodore Fraenkel, who in turn gave his full approval.[29] In acting as guarantors of the work (this being one of the meanings of *auctor*), the first full readers thus became actively involved in the work's authorship, their performative reading having transformed the collaboration into a foursome rather than a twosome. Overlaid by Aragon and Fraenkel, Breton and Soupault were able to recognize their text, albeit unequally in so far as Breton went on to oversee the actual compilation of the book and, more broadly, the theorization of automatism, while Soupault refrained from theory and reflection, asserting his authorial role mainly via first-hand accounts of his time as a surrealist. Behind one plural author, then, there lies another; there are more ways than one of reconstructing the 'original' community. In the case of *Les Champs magnétiques*, authorial will worked differently in the case of either scriptor, while Aragon as reader played a major part in constructing the legend of the mythical book.

With time, difference reasserts its claims within the utopia of creative non-differentiation. In his 'Lettre à A. Rolland de Renéville', Breton considers that poetic collaboration succeeds better among three than among two, due to the linking, resolving, and unifying function of the third party.[30] Soupault himself had already spoken of a 'certain balance' restored by the readings of Aragon and Fraenkel. The common view emerging from these comments suggests that there are two forms of plurality at work in collaborations: one which is binary, based on values of exchange, fusion, and likeness; and another which is dialectical, based on a dynamic of difference. On the one hand automatism appeals to the twinship ideal of an indefinitely trans-

[28] Aragon, 'L'Homme coupé en deux', p. 18.

[29] See Soupault, *Mémoires de l'oubli*, op. cit., p. 80.

[30] Breton, *Œuvres complètes*, II, p. 330.

ferable writing which subsumes identity and alterity into the figure of the undivided author; on the other, it comes up against the concern for 'style', whose advent depends on the presence of a third party, a qualifying alterity: 'J'ai besoin d'une troisième main' [I'm in need of a third hand], remarks the voice that speaks in 'Saisons'.[31]

The Continuing Misfortunes of the Plural Author

In the long run, the plural author cannot fail to disclose its paradoxes. A figurehead for the egalitarian ethics of a poetic writing 'made by all, not by one' (Lautréamont), it has also proved to be the clearest indicator of aesthetic inequalities and a constant bone of contention within surrealism. Whilst Breton, faithful to the principle of the 'common heritage', underlines the similarity of results obtained by different writers exercising minimal 'intervention', Aragon protests against the 'legend' that automatism merely involves learning a 'trick' whereupon texts of great poetic value and interest will flow from the pen like an 'unstoppable diarrhoea'. Opposing such indiscrimination, Aragon asserts that 'le surréalisme n'est pas un refuge contre le style' [surrealism is not a refuge from style].[32] André Masson makes the same point in more measured tones: 'Si je n'étais pas né dessinateur, mes dessins automatiques n'auraient évidemment pas la même valeur' [Had I not been born able to draw, my automatic drawings obviously wouldn't have the same value].[33] Whereas automatism does not suffice to make an author, an author can make automatism's fortune. At a cost, however, in that this necessarily involves a revalorization of the values of singularity and personal talent, i.e. a return of the author whose reign automatism had been meant to terminate. Ten years after *Les Champs magnétiques*, *Ralentir travaux* would pin its hopes on singularity as the best way to arrive at a common work. Each of the participants, driven by his own agenda, was intent on increasing his personal capital (and 'author', we should remind ourselves, comes from the Latin *augere*, to augment). While Breton's hope was to re-bond the surrealist community, Char's was to join it, and Eluard's to improve his abilities in the domain of

[31] Breton and Soupault, *Les Champs magnétiques*, op. cit., p. 40.

[32] Louis Aragon, *Traité du style* (Paris: Gallimard, 1928), pp. 187–9.

[33] André Masson, *Vagabond du surréalisme* (Paris: Editions Saint-Germain des prés, 1975), p. 83.

automatic writing. This re-evaluation of the original ethos of the plural author is not unrelated to Breton's own observation in 1933 that the history of automatism had been one of 'continuing misfortune'.

By desacralizing the image of an author situated 'outside' and 'prior to' the work (as Barthes and Foucault were later to characterize it), collaborative automatism promised the advent of a countless author, while at the same time appealing in contradictory fashion to a representation of talent, or *génie*, as 'surgissement perpétuel de nouveauté' [perpetual welling-up of novelty].[34] But how can the erasure of the author be invoked as the condition both of the new and of its own renewal, given that whatever founds cannot be repeated? The plural author cannot function at one and the same time as a model for authors to come and a guarantor of the founding gesture. A choice has to be made between the inventiveness of automatism and the promotion of a poetic writing 'made by all'. On the one hand, the myth of poetry at will disqualifies the rare and the singular at the risk of engendering what Soupault in *Les Dernières Nuits de Paris* (1928) calls 'la monotonie de l'étrange' [the monotony of strangeness], while, on the other, one can only found in the singular. And it is singularity rather than collective utopia, the force of division as opposed to that of propagation, which eventually won the day, due to the ultimate impossibility of associating the plural and the singular, the collective and the completely new, the common and the unusual. As a poetic formula, automatic writing is definitively the work of a single author, be it Janus or Proteus. Published as a book in 1920, the text of *Les Champs magnétiques* was not reprinted until 1967. André Breton and Philippe Soupault remain above all the inventors of a provisional rather than consequential writing, the authors of an event which freed spirits without weighing down library shelves: not the book through which, as Louis Aragon wished, the world would begin, but that through which belief in an authorless writing came to an end.

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[34] Foucault, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?', op. cit., p. 811.

A COMPANY OF SHADES: SUBJECT AND AUTHORSHIP IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S PROSE

'What is an author?' Michel Foucault's provocative question, launched in 1969 in a text[1] which remains canonical, provides an apposite starting point. It is especially apposite, because Foucault himself had borrowed from Beckett to formulate his opening theme: 'Qu'importe qui parle, quelqu'un a dit qu'importe qui parle' [What matter who's speaking, somebody said what matter who's speaking]. The relevance of the quoted phrase to Foucault's questioning of the author seems obvious, but the borrowed phrase has suffered a paradoxical fate. Elevated to the notoriety of a Foucauldian quotation, it has been used to blazon the death of the author, a death by indifference, and when Foucault's text is quoted in its English version, the Beckettian citation is frequently mistranslated in a manner which lends credence, perhaps even authority, to the Foucauldian misappropriation. This is the first point I wish to examine.

The canonical status of Foucault's text is itself something of a curiosity. In February 1969, addressing an audience of professional philosophers at the Collège de France, Foucault had insisted on the provisional nature of his discussion paper, emphasizing that he was presenting work in progress. A year later, he had already modified his text for a presentation at the University of Buffalo, and subsequently he sanctioned the publication of successive variant versions, which now are to be found, in various translations, in manuals and anthologies published for students' use.[2] So this canonical text enjoys a double life and a double

[1] Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits 1954–1988*, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), I, pp. 789–812.

[2] *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-structuralist Criticism*, ed. by Josué V. Harari (London: Methuen, 1980, first publ. 1979), see pp. 43, 141–160; *Michel Foucault: Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. by Donald F. Bouchard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977); *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern: A Reader*, ed. by Seán Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

authenticity. It is true that the successive versions tend towards similar conclusions. Nevertheless, the American version has a more ideological slant and conjures up more clearly Foucault's futuristic vision of a culture to come. In this vision, the author-function is destined to disappear, in favour of an alternative mode of functioning, as yet to be determined. Under this new regime, Foucault declares, fiction would not be limited by the figure of the author: 'All discourses, whatever their status, form, value, and whatever the treatment to which they will be subjected, would then develop in the anonymity of a murmur.'[3] The old questions attaching to the principle of textual authority would be scrapped, questions such as, 'Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse?' Instead, under the new reign of anonymity, a different set of questions would arise, which Foucault formulates: 'What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject-functions?' Foucault concludes: 'And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: "What difference does it make who is speaking?"'

In this stirring of indifference, it is hardly possible to discern the faintest shade of Samuel Beckett, whom the translation has effectively silenced. Far from expressing the indifference central to Foucault's thesis, Beckett's querying voice, 'Qu'importe qui parle, quelqu'un a dit qu'importe qui parle', presents a characteristic convolution, asserting at one and the same time the irreducible presence of utterance — 'quelqu'un a dit' — and the elusiveness, the infinite regression, of the uttering subject: 'What matter who's speaking, somebody said what matter who's speaking.' The shape of the formula mimics the conundrum it presents, being structured as a palindrome, in which the three elements which compose it can be read backwards. The version offered by Foucault's translator introduces false punctuation, with quotes and a comma, flattening the formula into an almost meaningless tautology: *'What matter who's speaking, somebody said, what matter who's speaking.'* So phrased, the parenthetical 'somebody said' becomes a trite redundancy, dismissing the question of identity, instead of marking the

[3] In Harari, op. cit., p. 160.

indelible presence of an uttering shade.

Beckett's phrase is drawn from a series of short texts written around 1950 and published eight years later under the title of *Textes pour rien*.[4] In these short texts, the same tormented question twists and turns and comes back endlessly to the void of the subject: 'Où irais-je, si je pouvais aller, que serais-je, si je pouvais être, que dirais-je, si j'avais une voix, qui parle ainsi, se disant moi?' [Where would I go, if I could go, who would I be, if I could be, what would I say, if I had a voice, who says this, saying it's me?].[5] The restless questioning of the subject — *qui parle ainsi se disant moi?* — remains unanswered for twenty-five years, until, with *Company*,[6] Beckett devises a specific form of narrative prose which integrates the problematic of its own utterance. The subject of this late text is the absence of subject. From the first line of the text, the reader is drawn into the debate: 'A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine. To one on his back in the dark.' Who is speaking? What voice announces the voice? To one on his back in the dark a voice comes, speaking of the past, evoking, in the second person singular, *you*, fragments of alleged experience, such as: 'A small boy you come out of Connolly's Stores holding your mother by the hand', or again: 'You are an old man plodding along a narrow country road.' In this way, the text establishes a binary discursive structure. On the one hand, there is the voice which tells of the past, the voice of memory speaking in the second person, *you*, and which constitutes an embedded tale, a secondary narrative instance. On the other, there is the primary narrative instance, articulated by an anonymous and impersonal voice speaking in the third person, asserting, for example that 'A voice comes to one in the dark' or that 'Only a small part of what is said can be verified.' What is the voice that asserts this? Who is speaking? The greater part of the text, forty-three paragraphs out of the fifty-eight that make up the text, pursues this interrogation, draws the reader into the quest, engages the reader, not in the time past of secondary narration, nor in its lyrical landscape of sea to the east, father's house to the west and, between the two, mountain and plain, but in the 'dark' of the present moment, the moment out of time and the indeterminate space of the here and now, the moment of

[4] *Nouvelles* et *Textes pour rien* (Paris: Minuit, 1958).

[5] Beckett's own translation, published in New York in 1959.

[6] *Company* (London: John Calder, 1980); henceforth *C*, with page references incorporated in the text. For the French text, see *Compagnie* (Paris: Minuit, 1980).

utterance.

Obsessively, inexhaustibly, the interrogative voice pursues its questioning, seeking out the ultimate source of utterance, the subject constantly deferred:

> What visions in the dark of light! Who exclaims thus? Who asks who exclaims. What visions in the shadeless dark of light and shade! Yet another still? Devising it all for company. What a further addition to company that would be! Yet another still devising it all for company. Quick leave him. (*C* 84)

The endless regression of the infinitely deferred subject conjures up a perspective too dizzy to contemplate. The interrogative voice dodges to the side, steps away from the abyss. The recurring phrase 'Quick leave him' marks the limits of the reasoning voice. The ultimate subject is beyond imagination.

With the term 'devise' and 'deviser', the quest for the ultimate seems to mimic the terminology of an old theological debate: 'And whose voice asking this? Who asks, Whose voice asking this? And answers, His soever who devises it all. In the same dark as his creature or in another. For company' (*C* 32). Each narrator is in turn narrated, each deviser devised: 'Devised deviser devising it all for company. In the same figment dark as his figments' (*C* 64). The 'devised deviser' points to the terminology of the argument from ultimate causes, which St Thomas Aquinas borrowed from Aristotle. The Aristotelean argument leads to the concept of the 'unmoved mover' of the cosmos, which is the divinity. For St Thomas, of course, this is the Christian God, the Supreme Creator, who moves the spheres, whereas in ancient cosmology Aristotle hesitates between forty-seven and fifty-five divinities to maintain the heavenly bodies in their motion.[7] In Beckett's text, the age-old question does not lead to an assertion of cosmic purpose, but to the recognition of ultimate confusion:

> Deviser of the voice and of its hearer and of himself. Deviser of himself for company. Leave it at that. He speaks of himself as of another. He says speaking of himself. He speaks of himself as of another. Himself he devises too for company. Leave it at that. Confusion too is company up to a point. (*C* 34)

The argument breaks into fragments — 'Leave it at that'. Instead of leading to the contemplation of a primordial *logos*, it leads us towards the dizzy abyss of a subject infinitely displaced and deferred, 'another

[7] Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1946), p. 477.

devising it all for company' (*C* 29, 45). In a world where the absolute creator is inconceivable, the infinitely deferred creator is equally a nonsense. Irony and derision denounce the futility of the argument and the futility of reason itself, in a ruthless pursuit *ad absurdum* of Aristotelean categories.[8] For where may the deferred creator be located? In the same dark as his creature or in another?

> In another dark or in the same devising it all for company. This at first sight seems clear. But as the eye dwells it grows obscure. Indeed the longer the eye dwells the obscurer it grows. [...] For why or? why in another dark or in the same? (*C* 29, 31–2)

And the fundamental question rebounds:

> And whose voice asking this? Who asks, Whose voice asking this? And answers, His soever who devises it all.
> [...] Unless another still. Nowhere to be found. Nowhere to be sought. The unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last person. I. Quick leave him. (*C* 34)

The questioning of existence is constantly brought back and refocused on the interrogation of the subject. Underpinning the text is the tension between the epistemic subject, source of utterance, and the experiential subject, represented by the mute and unresponsive Hearer on his back in the dark. The voice in the second person singular calls for reconciliation, it solicits the silent Hearer, appealing for recognition of memory and a past: 'To confess, Yes I remember. Perhaps even to have a voice. To murmur, Yes I remember. What an addition to company that would be! A voice in the first person singular. Murmuring now and then, Yes I remember' (*C* 20–21). The murmuring of remembrance would be a new state of consciousness, a reintegration of past and present, the fragmented self made whole: 'One day! In the end. In the end you will utter again. Yes I remember. That was I. That was I then' (*C* 27). But such a hope is figment and fable. The first person, locus of the subject and keystone of the edifice in ruins, is unattainable. The text moves to its close, which is solitude and silence:

> You now on your back in the dark shall not rise again to clasp your legs in your arms and bow down your head till it can bow down no further. But with face upturned for good labour in vain at your fable. Till finally you hear how words are coming to an end. With every inane word a little nearer to the last. And how the fable too. The fable of one with you in the dark. The fable of one fabling of one with you in the dark. And how better in the end labour lost and silence. And you as you always were.
> Alone. (*C* 88–9)

[8] See Joseph Long, 'Samuel Beckett et les reptations du créateur', in *Le Moi et ses espaces: Quelques repères identitaires dans la littérature française contemporaine*, ed. by David Gascoigne (Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen, 1997) pp. 123–34.

That final word is the negation of company, the negation both of subject remembered and the remembering self.

The late text *Company* occupies a special position in Beckett's prose work. When it was published in 1980, Beckett had not produced prose writing of any length for close on twenty years, since *Comment c'est*,[9] and twenty-seven years had elapsed since *L'Innommable*. It is, of all Beckett's writing, the text that seems to offer the most numerous and most telling glimpses of the author's life experiences. Paradoxically, these intimate moments, these seemingly autobiographical snatches articulated in the second person singular, are countered in the text by the 'reason-ridden' voice (*C* 45), relentlessly pursuing the impossibility of self-utterance. It is this very paradox, the tension between the two voices, between the subject telling and the subject told, which constitutes the specific signature of Beckett's new writing in *Company*. H. Porter Abbott speculates as to 'what inspiration or crisis brought *Company* into existence in the late seventies', and, referring to Deirdre Bair's biography which was about to be published at the time, puts forward the interesting suggestion that the writing of *Company*, begun in 1977, was something of an 'emergency action, occasioned by the imminence of a narrative presenting itself as the story of Samuel Beckett's life'.[10] From this perspective, the writing of *Company* appears as a defensive response, a rearguard action by Beckett, triggered by the work which Deirdre Bair had been preparing for over five years. Indeed, in the preface to the first edition of her biography, Deirdre Bair acknowledges her belief that Beckett 'did not want this book to be written and would have been grateful if I had abandoned it',[11] and she records the uncomfortable pleasantry with which Beckett greeted her at their first encounter: 'So you're the one who is going to reveal me for the charlatan that I am.' Abbott's suggestion is confirmed, in some measure, by Declan Kiberd, who in 1985 was writing the scenario of a television documentary on Beckett.[12] He recalls how Beckett gave freely of his advice and cooperation, and how, referring to *Company*, he declared that his own

[9] *Comment c'est* (Paris: Minuit, 1961).

[10] H. Porter Abbott, *Beckett writing Beckett: The Author in the Autograph* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 18–19.

[11] Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape 1978), p. xii. The remark does not appear in later editions.

[12] *Silence to Silence*, directed by Seán Ó Mórdha for RTE, 1985. I am indebted to Professor Kiberd for the discussion we had on the making of the documentary.

text was a closer account of the essentials than Bair's. So Beckett himself set his own writing in *Company* against the published biography. That is not to present *Company* as a counter-biography, but rather to point out that, at the very moment when another was inscribing him as the subject of a biographical work, Beckett develops, with *Company*, a paradoxical form of writing which yields the intimacy of private moments while at the same time asserting the impossibility of uttering the self and the elusiveness of the discursive subject.

Company reaches back to the preoccupations of the novels of the trilogy, written some thirty years earlier, in a way that represents both rupture and continuity. The text of *Company* is sustained by a structure *en abyme*, an infinite regression of the first person subject towards an infinitely deferred vanishing point. The novels of the trilogy, on the other hand, are dominated by the figure of the author in all its variants, or rather by successive figures of the 'author-function'. Molloy and Moran, in their different ways, are caught in a system of textual production and must give account of themselves to an external authority: for Molloy, 'so many pages, so much money',[13] while Moran's report is answerable to an order of mission 'to see about Molloy' (*T* 85). Traces of such a system appear in *Malone Dies*, in so far as Malone is dependent on the daily hand that thrusts his dish through the door. But his writing is no longer subordinate to an external impulse, however obscure; it aspires to being autonomous, to being free play: 'Now it is a game, I am going to play. I never knew how to play until now' (*T* 166). In the event, the free play of Malone's writing will be compromised by various constraints, distorted by generic conventions, polluted by intertextual intrusion and in the end infested by its author, that is, by Malone himself, in spite of the latter's determination to remain remote, to keep invention and self-writing strictly apart. Malone is forced in the end to recognize the impossibility of writing as free play: 'This exercise-book is my life, this big child's exercise-book, it has taken me a long time to resign myself to that. And yet I shall not throw it away' (*T* 252). For Malone, to taint writing with the presence of the author-subject is a failing which he has sought to avoid from the start and reason enough to throw the lot away. But this he will not do, in order to bring to fulfilment his original purpose, which is to bring about the simultaneous demise both of writing itself and of his

[13] Samuel Beckett, *The Beckett Trilogy* (London: Picador, 1979), p. 9. Henceforth *T*, with page references incorporated in the text.

own successive reincarnations, the successive and cumulative reincarnations of the figure of the author: 'Then it will be all over with the Murphys, Merciers, Molloys, Morans and Malones, unless it goes on beyond the grave' (*T* 217). The Beckettian 'unless' compromises the promise of closure, the apparent finality of the double demise achieved in the closing image of the text, where the huddled, indistinguishable figures are gathered in the boat adrift, under the threatening gesture of Lemuel's hatchet frozen into immobility: 'This tangle of grey bodies is they. Silent, dim, perhaps clinging to one another, their heads buried in their cloaks, they lie together in a heap, in the night' (*T* 263).

Throughout the novel, the question of the subject — who's speaking? — had been circumvented by the first-person narrative and by the two-level structure of the novel, Malone in his room and Malone inscribed in the exercise-book; in any event, it came to rest in Malone and expired with him. *The Unnamable* takes the development a stage further. It corresponds to the continuance beyond the grave alluded to above, a form of writing beyond the death of narrative and which is possible only on condition that the question of the subject is refused: 'Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on. [...] I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me' (*T* 267).

Some remnants of character and situation may be read into Molloy and Malone. It is more difficult in the case of the Unnamable, alias Mahood, presented as a limbless trunk and head stuck in a jar, to maintain that any traces at all remain of the traditional constituents of narrative fiction, unless it be as objects of derision. The principle of story, of events shaped into significance by the telling, is subjected to a particularly iconoclastic treatment: 'Perhaps Mahood will emerge from his urn and make his way towards Montmartre, on his belly, singing, I come, I come, my heart's delight' (*T* 341). From the very start, Beckett had railed against the presumption that narrative, as traditionally conceived in the novel, with all its consecutiveness and causality, could offer any significant account of experience or of the self. From the very start: that is, from *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*,[14] which he wrote in the summer of 1932, at the age of twenty-six, and which remained unpublished in his lifetime. Here, he denounces Balzac in the most absolute terms: 'To read Balzac is to receive the impression of a

[14] The Black Cat Press, 1992.

chloroformed world.' More specifically, in his view, the impression of falsity derives from the coherence and consecutivenss of Balzac's fictional world: 'He is absolute master of his material, he can do what he likes with it, he can foresee and calculate its least vicissitude, he can write the end of his book before he has finished the first chapter...' This falsifying coherence derives in turn from a concept of character as psychologically knowable, socially determined, an explicable and predictable product of environment: '...because he has turned all his characters into clockwork cabbages and can rely on their staying put wherever needed or staying going at whatever speed in whatever direction he chooses.'[15]

In Proust and, beyond Proust, in Schopenhauer, Beckett had found a theory of consciousness far more to his liking than the determinism of the nineteenth-century French novelists he had studied as a student. He had begun reading Schopenhauer in 1930, while researching the somewhat tendentious study of Proust which he gave to his publisher in September of that year.[16] For Schopenhauer, consciousness belongs to the domain of phenomena and has no ontological continuity. Beckett's account of Proust, influenced no doubt by his enthusiasm for Schopenhauer, paints a negative picture of the French novelist, and plays down the possibility of redemption and reintegration of the self through the working of affective memory and the creative imagination.[17] The figures of Molloy and Malone present a relentless parody of any such possibility of reintegration. Molloy has forgotten every fact and circumstance of how he has come to be living in his mother's room and, although a figure of authorship, he has forgotten the rudimentary techniques appropriate to that function: 'I've forgotten how to spell too, and half the words. That doesn't matter apparently. Good.' He announces his 'beginning' — 'Here's my beginning' — in a way which plays upon the distinction between the experiential subject — for what reasons, in what circumstances he first resolved to go and see his mother — and the epistemic subject — how and where, as narrator, he begins his text. Whereupon, he fails to make a beginning in either sense, for the pages which follow offer a long digression, an anecdote of encounter between

[15] Ibid., p. 118–19.

[16] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 118.

[17] See Nicholas Zurbrugg, *Beckett and Proust* (Gerrard's Cross, Bucks: Colin Smythe, 1988), pp. 101–29.

two figures, A and C, on a lone country road: 'So I saw A and C going slowly towards each other, unconscious of what they were doing' (*T* 10).

To speak of 'digression' is already to prejudice the reading, for the word implies that the text is, or should be, organized along the very principles of causality and motivation which have been held up to ridicule. It is only when such notions have been swept aside by derision that the text can freely develop an alternative mode of narrative writing, underpinned by principles compatible with the themes of exile and home, change and fragmentation, for these cannot be assimilated to notions of psychology and characterization. What is developed is more in the nature of a fable or myth. The two figures arbitrarily designated A and C become the focus of opposing themes: town and country, distance and approach, company and solitude, recognition and anonymity.[18] Around the figure C, Beckett weaves associations of weariness, renunciation, leave-taking, uncertainty, and later, knowledge and fear, innocence and betrayal:

> Each went his way, A back towards the town, C on by ways he seemed hardly to know, or not at all, for he went with uncertain step and often stopped to look about him, like someone trying to fix landmarks in his mind, for one day perhaps he may have to retrace his steps, you never know. (*T* 11)

In this minimalist mode of narrative, the narrator has no authorial prescience, he is not the site of interpretative knowledge, he stands absent from the scene and narrates events in the order of their perception. The effect of surprise is then all the greater when the narrator and his observing gaze are projected into the landscape, in such a way, moreover, as to blur the demarcation between narrator and narrated: 'I watched him recede, overtaken (myself) by his anxiety, at least by an anxiety which was not necessarily his, but of which as it were he partook. Who knows if it wasn't my own anxiety overtaking him' (*T* 12).

Another effect of surprise, in the ensuing lines, will be Molloy's evocation of Dante — surprise, that is, for a reader persisting in a realist mode of reading, interpreting Molloy as a real and human representation, a rounded characterization in however residual a way, rather than as a discursive voice. 'He hadn't seen me. [...] He gazed around as if to engrave the landmarks on his memory and must have seen the rock in the

[18] See the discussion in Michael Sheringham, *Beckett: Molloy*, Critical Guides to French Texts (London: Grant & Cutler, 1985), pp. 14–22.

shadow of which I crouched like Belacqua, or Sordello, I forget which.'[19] Cloaked in invisibility, the shade of the narrating subject haunts the landscape. The reader might be tempted to prompt the latter's failing memory and confirm that it was indeed Belacqua, the old Florentine lute-maker and friend of Dante, who, in Canto IV of the *Purgatorio*, sits in the shadow of a great rock, his knees drawn up and clasped in his hands, in a posture which recurs many times in Beckett's prose and notably in the closing passage from *Company* cited earlier.[20]

By such indirect means, by the refraction of intertextual reference, a system of associations and connections is inscribed in the text, deflecting the reader from investment of belief in a fictional world and its characters, refocussing the reading upon the text and its discursive complexities.

Beckett's new writing in the trilogy is distinguished by a number of clear, formal features. As from March 1946, he had adopted French as the primary language for his prose work, abandoning English; and he maintains that choice, almost without derogation, until he writes *Company* in English, in the late seventies.[21] The second formal feature is the use of a first-person narrative voice. That feature, too, will be abandoned with *Company*. The third feature is that the first-person narrator is himself a writer, obsessively concerned with the problematics of authorship and identity. There results from this, throughout the trilogy, an all-pervasive effect of *mise en abyme*, of writing within the writing, and a constant interrogation of the process of writing itself. However, the

[19] *T* 12. Belacqua has clear affinities for Beckett, who gives him a foster home within his prose work. He appears in the *Purgatorio* (VI, 58–151) as a shade fading into the background, like Molloy himself ('I was perched higher than the road's highest point and flattened what is more against a rock the same colour as myself, that is grey').

[20] Sordello casts an authorial shade no less explicit for being oblique. Like Dante himself, Sordello was a poet in exile, and, like Beckett himself, he wrote his work in a foreign country and in a foreign tongue — in Provençal, which was the variety of French spoken at the court of Anjou in the fourteenth century. The meeting with Sordello, in the sixth Canto, triggers Dante's imprecations against what Italy had become. Cf. *Purgatorio* VI, 58–151.

[21] For the date of March 1946, see James Knowlson, op. cit., p. 358. The view, still currently held, of Beckett alternating between the two languages is a mistaken view. In writing for performance, the choice of language is decided by circumstances of production. *Krapp's Last Tape* was the first text after the war to be written in English: it was written for the actor Patrick Magee and for a production at the Royal Court Theatre, London. See Joseph Long, 'The Reading of *Company*: Beckett and the Bi-textual Work', in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 32, 4 (1996), 314–28.

most telling feature transcends all those, and is the constant derision directed against the expectations and conventions of traditional narrative form, and the constant subverting of these conventions. A new demand is placed upon the reader, which, it must be said, many early critics failed to meet. They fail to meet it, or at least they appear to circumvent the task, as a recent commentator puts it, by 'identifying Beckett's characters as somehow real or human, when it is the rigorous investigation of their very status as bestowed by language that is at the heart of the Beckettian enterprise'.[22] Such a mistaken mode of reading, which one may term 'humanist', or 'realist', is one which persists in regarding the text, in however residual a way, as the means of access to a fictional world, inhabited by personages named, however precariously, Molloy, Moran, Malone, Mahood, up to and including the ultimate derision of the Unnamable. Whereas the text is soliciting the reader in a different direction, inviting a discursive mode of reading, one which is more attentive to the text itself and to its effects, responsive to features such as parody, intertextual reference, self-reflection. The role of the eponymous characters within the trilogy is not so much to represent, in some residually mimetic way, the plight of modern humanity in a world of desolation. It is, quite to the contrary, to dismantle and deride any such mimetic enterprise and, in so doing, to clear the way for an alternative mode of writing. That alternative mode is to be seen in passages which might misleadingly be read as digressive, such as the passage from *Molloy* referred to above, or in many of the metadiegetic passages of *Malone meurt*, where Malone moves, in his embedded narrative, from imprecation and derision to the liberated play of text.

It might be supposed that the liberated play of the text, like the anti-realist dissidence manifested in the whole of Beckett's evolving writing practice, and indeed in the very silence that follows the trilogy, moves in the direction of evacuating the subject-agency of the author and dismissing the problem of selfhood and of the 'writing 'I'. Such a supposition might move us close to Foucault's position, as signalled in his misappropriation of *Textes pour rien*. *Company* is there to disabuse us. Foucault has misconstrued Beckett, failing to see that what commands his writing and rewriting of the self, far from being a dismissal of all sense of ipseity and subject-agency, is on the contrary a

[22] P. J. Murphy, 'Beckett and the philosophers', in John Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 222.

very radical — rigorous, suggestive, haunted — attachment to a 'subject' beyond seizure, ungraspable. That is an entirely different matter, philosophically, from Foucault's declaration of insignificance. The narrative system which Beckett invents in the late text *Company* is, in fact, a subtle and cogent way of exploring a split sense of ipseity, since it sets up the tension we have observed between the self-remembering personal voice and the voice of the unnamable epistemic subject. The latter is, or would be if he were not infinitely deferred, a transcendent, quasi-divine self-identity, as conceived in various forms of rationalist-idealist essentialism of Western inheritance.

What lies behind Beckett's vigorous renunciation of realist works and pomps, with their particular notions of selfhood, authorship and the 'writing I', is less the sense that these things are insignificant and without reality; rather it is the poetic sense that such forms are at an infinite remove from the central and unnamable sense of ipseity (or intuited subject-identity) that keeps him writing in the first place — and keeps him writing, despite the ever more closely verified impossibility, by reason of infinite epistemic and causal regression, of saying anything about such allusive 'haunting' other than his own impotence to re-say as artist what would need saying in order to found the 'I' cognitively.

Foucault's misconstrual of Beckett is deeply revealing at this point. Both are inheritors of Western rationalist essentialism. The one ends up saying that the subject of writing is no God, but that there is nothing else to say, other than 'how it is' with the central 'I' as existentially experienced — and that there is no one else to say it (better, at least, than the utterances of a realist biographer). The other is content to say there is no God, and so no subject and no writing 'I' worth talking about. The difference is, perhaps, between the prosaism of the deconstructionist ideologue and the artist impenitently and desolately faithful to the real enigma of subject identity.

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DREAMING THE SELF, WRITING THE DREAM: THE SUBJECT IN THE DREAM-NARRATIVES OF GEORGES PEREC

It was in 1968 that Georges Perec started to keep some record of his dreams — at first only occasionally, but then by 1970 more systematically. This was for him a period of intense self-scrutiny. He was pursuing a number of quasi-autobiographical projects, often of a more or less oblique kind — family history, notes on places he knew, bedrooms he had slept in, the books on his bookshelf, even the cats that had kept him company. In retrospect, these dream-texts, which he gathered and published in 1973 under the title *La Boutique obscure: 124 rêves*,[1] can be seen as just one of a series of experiments in writing the self and its history, produced in a phase of diverse exploration that would culminate in the multi-layered *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* which appeared in 1975.[2]

His most intensive dream-writing activity overlaps with the period of his extended psychoanalysis with Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, which started in May 1971 in the wake of the painful break-up of his extra-marital relationship with a wealthy older woman, Suzanne Lipinska. Perec offered Pontalis these dream-narratives as material for analysis, but to no avail: 'Mon analyste ne prit pas ces récits en considération: ils étaient trop soigneusement empaquetés, trop polis, trop au net, trop clairs dans leur étrangeté même' [My analyst didn't take these narratives into consideration: they were too carefully packaged, too polished, too clear in their very strangeness].[3] This disenchanted view seems to have been

[1] Georges Perec, *La Boutique obscure: 124 rêves* (Paris: Denoël/Gonthier, 1973). The dreams, but not the pages, are numbered.

[2] G. Perec, *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* (Paris: Denoël, 1975).

[3] G. Perec, 'Le rêve et le texte' in *Je suis né* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), pp. 75–9 (p. 76). While

adopted by Perec himself when, in a prefatory note to *La Boutique obscure*, he describes them as 'ces rêves trop rêvés, trop relus, trop écrits, [...] gerbe de textes déposée aux portes de cette "voie royale" qu'il me reste à parcourir — les yeux ouverts' [these dreams excessively dreamed, reread, and written up, [...] a sheaf of texts laid at the gateway to the 'royal road' I still have to travel — with my eyes open]. At that stage, then, still in mid-analysis, he set no store by them as a guide to inner truth, entering a sceptical note against any attempt to apply here Freud's famous dictum that 'the interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind'.[4]

Critics seem to have reacted to these sceptical pronouncements by according *La Boutique obscure* little attention: a recent study calls it the most 'opaque' and 'enclosed' of his books.[5] Yet why not accept Perec's invitation to read these writings as composed texts rather than primarily as coded keys to the writer's unconscious? The ambiguous status of these writings is underlined by their genesis: while they are closely based on the notebooks in which he recorded his dreams as they happened, in all their immediacy, they were, for the purposes of publication, subject to a process of editing.[6] Perec refers to this dream-writing as 'un texte qui semblait se produire tout seul' [a text which seemed to write itself],[7] but this notion of the self-generating text (echoing the Surrealists' 'automatic writing') is compromised by editorial tidying-up, which jeopardizes their claim to 'authenticity' as unmediated outflow of the subconscious. This hybrid status, however, leaves would-be commentators free to choose an approach combining psychoanalysis and textual analysis as seems

denying the truth-value of these texts, Perec nevertheless hints at a deep-lying itinerary of quest discernible in their depths (p. 77). This essay first appeared in 1979.

[4] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols, trans. by J. Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), IV–V, p. 608.

[5] Claude Burgelin, *Les Parties de dominos chez Monsieur Lefèvre: Perec avec Freud — Perec contre Freud* (Strasbourg: Circé, 1996), p. 70.

[6] I have not consulted the manuscript originals. Philippe Lejeune, who has, describes them as having undergone 'léger élagage et toilette' in preparation for publishing, adding: 'Si modeste que soit cette toilette, elle constitue un travail'. See P. Lejeune, *La Mémoire et l'oblique: Georges Perec autobiographe* (Paris: P.O.L., 1991), pp. 52, 187.

[7] G. Perec, 'Le rêve et le texte', p. 77. Elsewhere he notes that 'les rêves me venaient tout écrits dans la main, y compris leurs titres' [the dreams came ready written to my hand, their titles included]: see 'Les lieux d'une ruse', in *Penser/Classer* (Paris: Hachette, 1985), pp. 59–72 (p. 70).

appropriate, while serving notice that much in these texts will not be readily 'explained' by either.

This approach also renders otiose the issue of intended or unintended meaning in the texts. Perec was scarcely ingenuous or uninformed as regards psychoanalysis: Pontalis was the third such consultant in his life,[8] and Perec was very familiar with Freudian concepts.[9] As he edited his texts, he would have been alert to elements lending themselves readily to Freudian interpretation.[10] (In determining their layout, Perec gives a specific nod in the direction of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*: he borrows from Freud an editorial convention for transcribing alternatives in dreams.)[11] It was perhaps this built-in hermeneutic self-consciousness which made Pontalis sceptical of the usefulness of these dream-narratives for analysis, but for a reader not wedded to psychoanalytic decoding it is simply another aspect of the text as performance, specifically its effort to

[8] In earlier life he had had psychological counselling from Françoise Dolto in the 1940s, and an extended analysis with Michel M'Uzan in the 1950s, to which he refers frequently in his correspondence with his close friend Jacques Lederer. See *'Cher, très cher, admirable et charmant ami...': Correspondance Georges Perec et Jacques Lederer 1956–1961* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997).

[9] As early as 1959 he listed Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* as one of the works influencing the piece he was then writing: see *Correspondance Perec-Lederer*, p. 191. In the autumn of 1971, within the period covered by the dream-collection, he wrote a radio-play, *Fonctionnement du système nerveux dans la tête*, which represented a mental replay of Freud's 'primal scene'. See David Bellos, *Georges Perec: A Life in Words* (London: Harvill, 1993), pp. 263, 485.

[10] The narrator of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, for instance, takes a dismissive view as regards any effort to 'chercher dans mes phrases, pour évidemment les trouver aussitôt, les résonances mignonnes de l'Œdipe ou de la castration' (p. 59). In the view of Jaccques Lecarme, 'presque tous les écrits de Perec professent indifférence ou méfiance à l'égard de la démarche freudienne, alors même qu'ils parcourent des territoires réservés de la psychanalyse' (J. Lecarme, 'Perec et Freud ou le mode d'emploi', *Cahiers Georges Perec*, 4 (Paris: Editions du Limon, 1990), 121–41 (p. 123). Burgelin, for his part (op. cit., pp. 199–200), detects admiration and complicity as well as hostility in Perec's response to Freud.

[11] In one of his own dreams noted in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (pp. 317–18), Freud saw a notice reading 'You are requested to close the eyes' or 'to close an eye'. His way of recording this is:

Man bittet, *die* / *—* / *ein* *Auge(n) zuzudrücken.*

The original text is to be found in Freud, *Studienausgabe*, II: *Die Traumdeutung* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1972), p. 316. Perec adopts this convention in *La Boutique obscure*: see dreams 8, 24, 58, 74, 82 and 108. These two sentences from Freud are quoted by Perec (in French, and inserted into a quite different context) in *La Vie mode d'emploi* (Paris: Hachette, 1978), p. 257.

control and construct its reception by an implied reader. If one accepts Perec's insistence that his dreams were at the service of textual production and not the other way round, then this element of psychoanalytic self-consciousness is also part of the play of the text as calculated confession.

Perec's decision to publish these texts points up another aspect of their hybridity. What appears to have started as a purely private writing practice, for Perec's own benefit or that of his analyst, ends as a work disseminated to the reading public. Who, then, is the implied reader? To what Other are these texts addressed? The indices are characteristically mixed. Some writing strategies suggest an effort at clinical fidelity to the original, unmediated dream experience, with all its gaps, uncertainties and discontinuities. Elsewhere, however, we are given information from his waking life, to assist our interpretation of this or that detail.

In his dream-writing project, Perec is thus unable to maintain the illusion of being a neutral recorder of inner events: he places them in a frame of contextual information which orients the reader. While dreaming the self may be innocent because involuntary, writing the dream implies 'reading' it and projecting this reading into text. This self-conscious process of framing and presentation is particularly apparent in occasional notations which sketch an incipient taxonomy of dreams. Texts can be labelled from the very start with a generic category: 'Le rêveur (car toute cette histoire ressemble à un roman à la troisième personne)' [The dreamer (for this whole story is like a third-person novel)] (dream 28); 'Cest un film d'aventures en couleurs' [It's a adventure film in technicolour] (dream 41). Elsewhere the generic nature of the representation is all that survives of the end of the narrative: 'De nombreuses péripéties qui deviennent des gags à la "Lucky Luke"' [Various twists and turns ending up as Lucky Luke-type comic episodes] (dream 59).

What is notable here is the frequency with which the dream events are presented in terms of theatre or cinema, as though this were the best way of conveying the sense of the self as at once participant in and spectator/producer of an inner scenario. 'C'est un film dont a) je suivrais le tournage, b) j'assisterais, une fois monté, à la projection, c) je serais l'un des acteurs' [It's a film with me a) watching the filming, b) present at the showing once it's edited, c) as one of the actors] (dream 14). This is a metaphor for the sense of awareness of the process experienced within the dream itself: while being the actor 'on stage' and the subject

of the scenario,[12] the self is simultaneously aware that it is generating and observing the 'production'. This inner framing of the dream scenario corresponds to the intuition of the dreamer within the dream that 'this is only a dream', that he is both inside and outside it, contained by it and independent of it:

> je rêve et je sais que je rêve (dream 1)
> peu à peu je comprends que je rêve (dream 11)
>
> I'm dreaming and know that I am dreaming
> gradually, I grasp that I am dreaming

Freud attributes the occurrence of this intuition to the operation of a psychic censorship, seeking to defuse material that risks creating anxiety or distress. For him, this process of 'secondary revision' (*sekundäre Bearbeitung*) operates constantly on the dream-thoughts, seeking to impose its own order.[13] For our purposes it is useful to distinguish between the related functions of censorship and ordering. Perec's dream texts do indeed offer obvious marks of literal self-censorship: witness the sign // indicating a deliberate suppression of material, and the semi-masking of the identity of Perec's friends under their initials. This censoring function corresponds to what Lejeune identifies as the very first characteristic of Perec's autobiographical enterprises, modesty.[14] However, the manner in which Perec draws attention to the process of presentation (ordering, interpretation) of dream material in his recourse to framing and classifying has its roots not simply in a Freudian mechanism of self-censorship but in the ambiguous requirements of the whole dream-writing project, which, as writing, transcends the improvised verbal performance of a subject undergoing analysis. In texts such as these, 'secondary revision' extends to cover the writer's awareness of the process of producing the self in words, of the calculated strategies involved in suggesting, without actually imposing, a way of reading the text, and thereby a certain construction of the self. This 'revising' function is so powerfully marked here that it is as though we are dealing not with two selves (waking and dreaming) but with three: the waking self, the 'dreamed' self as script/protagonist, and an intervening self as censoring but also ordering narrator within the dream.

[12] 'Every dream deals with the dreamer himself. Dreams are completely egotistical' (Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 322).

[13] Ibid., pp. 488–506.

[14] Lejeune, op. cit., p. 40.

Freud argues that the function of 'secondary revision' is to be identified with the activity of our waking thought:

> Our waking (preconscious) thinking behaves towards any perceptual material with which it meets in just the same way in which [secondary revision] behaves towards the content of dreams. It is the nature of our waking thought to establish order in material of that kind, to set up relations in it and to make it conform to expectations of an intelligible whole.[15]

The prevalence of the metaphors of cinema/theatre, with the implied paraphernalia of control over the spectacle (self as actor/scriptwriter/producer/cameraman), throws into relief the operation of this revising function in the genesis of the dream text. The equivalent behaviour of waking processes to which Freud compares it is also heavily manifest in *La Boutique obscure*: Perec's numbering, dating and titling of the texts, and his inclusion, at the end of the book, of an elaborate index of themes and motifs in addition to a normal table of contents, seems designed precisely to 'establish order' in the material, 'to set up relations in it and to make it conform to expectations of an intelligible whole'. In short, one might see it in Freudian terms as a strategic effort at recuperation, a machine mobilized to deny the dangerous disorder and irrationality of what is being recorded, by 'framing' the whole corpus of dream-texts in an analytic, classificatory, pseudo-encyclopaedic apparatus.

What we have called the third, intervening self thus assumes special importance, because it is operating at the critical interface between the irresistible pressure of dream material and the powerful demands of a waking order struggling to maintain its grip. This tension could equally well be expressed in terms of Ricœur's notion of narrative identity, in which the stories we inwardly tell ourselves about ourselves serve to establish a sense of ongoing identity while yet remaining partial and inconclusive. Perec's paratextual apparatus can in this light be seen to relativize and thus intellectually defuse the raw power of the material, so that ipseity, ever unstable and provisional, remains to be inferred from a constantly shifting narrative production of the self.

The presence of the 'three selves' within the economy of the dream is lucidly manifest in dream 4, 'L'illusion' (December 1968), which reads:

[15] Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 499.

> Je rêve/ Elle est près de moi. Je me dis que je rêve. Mais la pression de sa main me semble trop forte/ Je me réveille. Elle est bel et bien près de moi. Bonheur fou. J'allume/ La lumière surgit un centième de seconde puis s'éteint (une lampe qui claque)/ Je l'enlace/
>
> (je me réveille : je suis seul)
>
> I dream/ She is near me/ I tell myself I'm dreaming/ But the pressure of her hand seems to me too heavy/ I wake up/ She really is there beside me. Wildly happy. I put the light on/ The light comes on for a hundredth of a second, then goes off (burned out)/ I embrace her/
>
> (I wake up: I'm alone)

Here, the third self, announced by 'Je me dis que je rêve', charged with keeping the dream phantasm framed, labelled, and thus in perspective and under control, is fooled ('bel et bien'), and in a single flashbulb explosion, the sexual fantasy claims the status of the real. Finally (after a blank on the page), waking reality reasserts itself, and order and perspective are re-established — but bring no comfort. The power of the illusory 'bonheur fou' lingers on as an undeniable dream of wish-fulfilment, manifest outside the melancholy brackets which enclose the final line.[16] The text oscillates between the three selves — variously sleeping, waking, and conscious-within-the-dream — and, from the configuration of all three, projects a moment in the life of the self as an unstable tension between the dream of desire fulfilled and a sense of loss and absence.

I have suggested that the recurrence of the idea of theatre in these texts is a framing process, a formal reflection of the operation of a censoring/ordering function within the dream and/or its transcription. This function is central to the literary practice of subjectivity in these texts and is marked by the presence of what I have called the 'third self'. The notion of theatre gains still further in significance when we begin to analyse the networks of connotation which spring from it relating to central preoccupations in Perec's life. To suggest how this works, we can start from one of the many references to participation in a play, taken from the central paragraph of dream 84, 'Le refus de témoigner' (August 1971):

> Je joue dans une pièce, mais je dois également présenter l'acteur aux notables. Or le maire est gâteux. Je fais comprendre par signes que c'est son compagnon de table qui doit parler: tandis que le vrai maire reste muet, le faux fait un discours très bien imité.

[16] Perec had already penned elaborate descriptions of such intermediate states of consciousness in *Un Homme qui dort* (Paris: Denoël, 1967), stimulated, it seems, by the celebrated opening pages of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

> I'm acting in a play, but I also have to present the actor to VIPs. The mayor is senile. I gesture to them that it's his companion at table who has to do the speaking: while the real mayor keeps mum, the false one does a very good imitation speech.

A reader of a Freudian turn of mind could develop a possible biographical decoding of this text, centring on the homophone 'maire'/'mère' [mayor/mother]. Perec was haunted by the disappearance of his mother after her deportation to Auschwitz in 1943, a bereavement which lies at the heart of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*. It is not difficult, therefore, to read the last line of the quotation as 'tandis que la vraie mère reste muette, la fausse fait un discours très bien imité' [whereas the true mother keeps mum, the false one does a very good imitation speech], where 'la fausse' could be taken as an expression of suppressed resentment towards his aunt Esther who conscientiously took over the maternal function. The following paragraph finds him telling Z (the initial standing for Suzanne Lipinska) that 'cela n'a pas une réelle importance, que l'autre est en fait l'ancien maire, et, en même temps, le meilleur ami et le pire ennemi du vrai' [that it really doesn't matter, that the other one is in fact the former mayor, and, at the same time, the best friend and the worst enemy of the true one]. The resentment is thus initially repudiated (censored) and Esther's credentials reinstated (she was a mother in her own right before taking charge of Georges); finally, however, the tension surfaces again from his mixed feelings about this substitution: 'she is doing what his real mother would have wished' (= best friend) — 'she is illegitimately displacing her' (= worst enemy). That he is expressing these mixed feelings to Z places his relationship with her under the shadow of his maternal trauma, and he seeks solace from her. The dream ends: 'Je fais l'amour avec Z. Il n'y a qu'en elle, en fin de compte, que je sois bien' [I make love to Z. It's only in her, really, that I feel good]. In reality (Perec's biographer suggests), there were undoubtedly mixed feelings here too: while he often desperately missed his former lover and patroness, it was he who had severed the relationship some months earlier.

This final sentence of the dream casts a new light on its opening words: 'Je crois découvrir dans mon appartement une grande pièce, mais en fait elle n'est pas à moi, et même, c'est la rue' [I think I discover in my apartment a large room, but in fact, it isn't mine, and indeed it's the street]. The statement 'elle n'est pas à moi' can now be seen as representing both the lost mother and the loss of his relationship with Suzanne. Suzanne kept a room for him at her house in Normandy, so in a

literal sense too the 'room' is not his. In turn, the final sentence, 'Il n'y a qu'en elle [...] que je sois bien', can be taken to refer both to the (lost) room (the mirage-room in his flat) and the lost intimate haven of mother and lover. We can now also note a slippage between the two senses of 'pièce' (room and play) in this dream. 'Je joue dans une pièce', from the central paragraph quoted above, could now refer to play with the mother or — 'je jouis' — erotic satisfaction with the lover.[17] The idea of a theatrical play disappears as soon as it is mentioned, to be displaced by the ritual of presentation to the two mayors, so that this 'pièce' is as ephemeral as the room in his flat, which is at once displaced by the street. He has been thrust out of the 'jeu', the 'pièce', the locus of the protecting and erotically satisfying female Other, into a stressful public space: 'Plein de gens arrivent et envahissent ma chambre' [a whole load of people come along and invade my room].

Looking at this figuration in the context of Ricœur's concept of narrative identity, however, we can read it in a slightly different perspective. The 'pièce'-as-play, as we have seen, represents the self-narrating subject; the self is both inside it and outside it ('je joue dans une pièce, mais je dois présenter l'acteur aux notables'). The 'pièce'-as-room represents a defining space of self which it is no longer possible to inhabit — the self as cherished child, the self as fulfilled lover. These roles, now externalized as dream or fantasy, are relativized and left behind. The desired stasis of the room and the dynamic evolution of the play of self represent the poles of the unstable project of self-realization in the narrative subject. The move from a private space to one invaded by the public further reflects, in the writing project, the decision to publish this material previously intended for private/analytic purposes only. The constant refiguration of narrative identity can go public — as it will, decisively for Perec, with the publication in 1975 of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*.

Further evidence of the significance of the 'pièce'/'théâtre' link can be seen if we analyse the way it unobtrusively frames the very first dream in the collection, 'La taille' (May 1968). Despite becoming sketchy towards the end, this is one of the more substantial texts, and one containing significant elements of self-interpretation. It is composed of three distinct episodes. The first concerns the threat the narrator feels at the prospect of having to stand under a height-gauge for several hours, as a vexatious

[17] Dream 108, 'La pièce de théâtre', provides a further example of this slippage.

punishment rather than a real ordeal. He fears emerging shorter because of the unrestrained weight resting on his head.

He goes on to identify this dream-episode as a metaphor for the prison-camps, as though such a camp were the inescapable locus of his dream-world: the height-gauge thus represents in condensed form the terror of that abiding awareness. In fact (he tells us) the punishment is never inflicted: the threat of it *is* the terror. Its non-realization is precisely what links it to camp-life and to the inmates' experience of being utterly at the mercy of the arbitrary, unaccountable will of the authorities. This nightmare of total subjection to a capricious system of punishment was, of course, to be given full expression in Perec's portrait of the island-colony of W in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*.

The height-gauge itself relates, presumably, to checks on growth made during childhood. These can become for the children concerned an anxious measuring of their perceived 'growth' towards adult stature and successful maturation. In the light of such apprehension, this monitoring can become burdensome, fearful, *belittling*: 'on risque de rapetisser' [one is in danger of getting smaller].[18] Since height is seemingly preordained, beyond the range of one's willpower, it seems arbitrary. One is tempted to see here another Freudian play of the signifier: 'le camp' = 'le quand' ('the when', as in 'When will I grow up?'). Hence, 'comme si je ne faisais jamais rien d'autre que de rêver de ce camp' = 'as if I did nothing else but dream of this camp/this when'.

In the second episode he is, with someone else, opening a cupboard containing two hiding-places for the riches of deportees, riches being here defined as 'tous objets susceptibles d'augmenter la sécurité et les possibilités de survie de leur possesseur' [all objects likely to increase their owner's safety and possibilities of survival]. The first contains old woollens ('lainages'), the other, in a concealed compartment, money. As soon as he is on the point of opening the second compartment, an officer arrives.

Here too, we can suggest an analytic, biographical reading. In this light, the reference to camps and deportees places the dream firmly beneath the shadow of his lost mother. The 'lainages' of motherly comfort are old and tatty (like the few memories he has preserved of her). The treasure-store of money which he is about to lay bare ('dévoiler') is,

[18] Cf. dream 90, 'Ma taille' (October 1971), which describes his embarrassment at feeling 'desperately small'.

whatever more precise meaning it might be given, clearly an enabling, empowering heritage; and it seems plausible to give this a paternal significance alongside the maternal 'lainages', both being seen as indispensable to the legatee's 'safety and possibilities for survival'. The arriving officer cuts off access to this inheritance (we might recall that Perec's father died in uniform).

The third episode refers to a 'représentation théâtrale' [theatrical performance] which would, we are told, doubtless have furnished the name of the camp (perhaps the 'Requiem of Terezienburg'). Treblinka and Katowicze are also mentioned as possibilities, but not the (taboo?) name of Auschwitz.

One obvious biographical sense that can be given to this text as a whole is that of coping with the difficult heritage of loss and absence: the oppressive weight, the sense of being subject to arbitrary (not natural) authority, of being condemned to imagine and relive incessantly his mother's ordeal in the death-camp; and the consequent fear of never coming into one's inheritance, never acquiring adult empowerment, never achieving a fulfilling ritual of leave-taking (a 'requiem') to exorcise the nightmare. It represents the difficult struggle towards what he referred to elsewhere as 'cette joie enfin de pouvoir me définir comme un homme, plus comme un fils' [the joy of being able to define myself finally as a man, no longer as a son], the shift from a private, relational identity to an independent, public one. [19]

Again, the element of framing/ordering makes itself felt. The dream is self-consciously recorded, with an element of detached narrative analysis built in ('La seconde séquence reprend ces thèmes en les modifiant à peine' [The second sequence repeats these themes barely modified]) to emphasize its hidden unity. The 'représentation théâtrale' of the third episode is a metatextual characterization of the dream as a whole, throwing into relief its operation as a theatre of the self doubled in its dreaming and observing/ordering manifestations: 'je rêve/ et je sais que je rêve' [I dream/ and know I am dreaming]; 'deux personnages (dont l'un est certainement moi-même)' [two individuals (one of them certainly myself)]. In the context of this theatrical frame, the opening phrase is again subject to the kind of slippage we have seen already: 'C'est une pièce avec plusieurs personnes' comes now to suggest not just a 'room', but a 'play' with several characters ('personnages'), or an inner

[19] *Correspondance Perec-Lederer*, p. 42.

drama between different *personas* of the self.

In this dream, the presence of fear and peril is unmistakably obvious ('évident', used twice) while the inner resources to combat it are concealed from view. What is implicit throughout this dream is a dialectic of the manifest and the hidden, of the spoken and the unspoken, of what is displayed and what is censored. This delicate dance of exhibition and concealment is at the heart of Perec's dream-writing (and arguably of many other of his texts besides), and it is choreographed by the third — censoring/ordering — self, which seeks constantly to direct the shifting play of narrative subjectivity. The moral of the final episode is suggested: 'on se sauve (parfois) en jouant' [one is saved (sometimes) by playing/acting]. This theatre of subjectivity seems the one possible means of salvation. For the actor to 'sortir de la pièce' [walk out of the play/room] is, we are told, a kind of suicide, understood perhaps as a surrender to the manifest forces of fear and threat and an abandonment of the treasures within, waiting to be unveiled and brought into play. Hence the final insistence on the theatrical representation as a glimpsed solution, even if for the moment its capacity to *name* the camp, i.e. to identify and express the dilemma, and to provide repose ('requiem') remains unfulfilled.

The curious little summary placed at the head of this dream-text ends as follows: 'L'humiliation. ? . L'arbitraire' [Humiliation. ? . The arbitrary]. As the spacing suggests, between the humiliation of the self, struggling to define itself as a mature and empowered entity, and the 'arbitraire' of history and family history which encompasses it, there lies simply the question mark: the subject as question mark?

What I have sought to trace in these texts is the operation of what I have called the third self, exercising Freud's function of 'secondary revision' both within the dream and outside it, censoring and ordering, mediating between the 'raw' dream-material and the demand for intelligibility characterizing waking consciousness. This function is often figured in these texts as a framed theatrical space, a 'pièce' in which the dreamer can act/be himself, a locus for the play of identity where fundamental desires and fears can find expression in word and gesture.

The figure of theatre however carries within it a series of founding dichotomies: 'real' identity and role-play, actor and spectator, on-stage and off-stage: but (the text suggests) it remains an essential survival

strategy, the only mode in which the conflicts of identity can be creatively played out. We have seen how it articulates the problems of Perec's sense of self, relating to the inaccessible treasure of parental heritage and the feelings of humiliating disempowerment and of guilt/resentment thereby engendered. What has emerged too is the instability of narrative subjectivity, between stasis and dynamism, display and concealment. Another way of describing the model of the subject in these texts could be found in Lacan's reflections on the decentred, dialectical subject, constantly reconfigured around a central lack, never finding the closure, 'l'absolution qui le rendrait à son désir' [the absolution which would give it back to its desire].[20] Lacan uses a series of more or less interchangeable terms in depicting 'the discontinuous itineraries of the subject'[21] such as *refente*, *division*, and *Spaltung*:

> cette refente (*Spaltung*) que le sujet subit de n'être sujet qu'en tant qu'il parle. (Ce que symbolise la barre oblique de noble bâtardise dont nous affectons l'S du sujet pour le noter d'être ce sujet-là: $.).[22]
>
> this splitting (*Spaltung*) which the subject suffers by virtue of being a subject only in so far as he speaks. (Which is what is symbolized by the oblique bar of noble and bastardly descent which we put upon the S of the subject to mark it out as that subject: $).

In Lacanian terms, Perec's theatre of the subject figures 'le lieu de la parole' [the place of utterance] which is the place of the Other: 'L'Autre est donc le lieu où se constitue le je qui parle avec celui qui entend' [The Other is thus the place where the speaking 'I' is constituted together with the listening 'I'].[23] The listening Other is also multiform: we have already noted the ambivalence of the addressee of these texts — Perec's analyst, Perec's readers, Perec as his own reader?

Lacan's symbol of the barred S is relevant here because it is explicitly, and no doubt disingenuously, referred to in the text. It can usefully serve

[20] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 634.

[21] The phrase is Malcolm Bowie's: see his *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 117.

[22] Lacan, *Ecrits*, p. 634. We have already noted Perec's use of the (double) 'barre oblique' to signify the gap left by censored material in his text.

[23] Ibid., p. 431. As Bowie explains: 'For Lacan as for Freud the primal Other is the father within the Œdipal triangle'; 'the *nom-du-père* [...] introduces a gap between desire and its object(s) which the subject is bounded by [...] at all levels of his experience' (op. cit., pp. 117, 119). The arrival of the officer in 'La taille' could be interpreted in this sense.

as an introduction to the final nexus to be discussed here, which centres on the letters S and Z and which will serve to demonstrate just how intellectually self-conscious this ludic figuration of the self can become in Perec's hands. The first section of dream 91 ('25 coups de bâton': October 1971) reads:

> Je donne 25 coups de bâton. Il s'agit d'un spectacle auquel Z assiste sans y rien comprendre.
>
> Moi-même, ce que je comprends, c'est quelque chose comme: de A à Z, où Z est la zébrure, la coupure, la cicatrice.
>
> I give 25 blows with a stick. This is a spectacle witnessed uncomprehendingly by Z.
>
> What I myself understand is something like A to Z, where Z is the slash, the cut, the scar.

Once again, the event is framed as a theatrical spectacle. Giving '25 coups de bâton' (to whom or what?) — is this to be seen as a gratuitous display of violence, watched by his uncomprehending former lover? The reference to the alphabet in the following paragraph encourages us to read it, rather, in terms of the expression 'faire des bâtons': the action of a schoolchild practising strokes of the pen as a preparation for learning to write. In this perspective, the '25 coups' recall *La Disparition*, Perec's lipogram novel published two years earlier, where the number 25 recurs throughout as a mark of the complete absence from that text of one of the 26 letters, the letter 'e'. (Perec largely composed *La Disparition* at Suzanne's house at Andé, and the sight of him labouring to meet such a preposterous challenge must indeed have seemed incomprehensible — 'sans y rien comprendre' — to most of the friends who gathered there. But it was *his* way of learning to write.) In this dream the letter focused on is not 'e' but 'z', glossed as the slash, the cut, the scar. It is the mark of damage or loss sustained: 'de A à Z' could be read as an encoding of the name Auschwitz, complete with real 'coups de bâton'. But, as before, the lost lover may also be being evoked: in particular, in so far as Perec chooses to refer to Suzanne throughout these texts as Z rather than S, the letter Z becomes in addition the 'scar' of his rupture with her.

When we note that the second half of this dream concerns his mixed feelings towards the state of Israel ('Il y a deux hommes en moi. L'un est favorable à Israël, l'autre hostile' [There are two men in me. One is favourable to Israel, the other hostile]), then the 'cicatrice' might also evoke the scar of circumcision, the fleshly inscription of the law of the

Father,[24] around which gather very ambiguous feelings about his own Jewish identity.[25] The family name would elsewhere have been commonly transcribed with a final 'z' — Peretz — in line with the Polish pronunciation. The 'z' is thus also a mark of his non-French heritage, the 'coupure' between his family roots and the linguistic culture in which he has his being. The word 'coupure' springs up in several contexts and senses in a group of dreams between May and July 1971: from a 'minuscule coupure à l'index' [tiny cut on the index finger] in dream 72, to 'coupures à pratiquer dans un texte' [cuts to be made in a text] (dream 70) to 'la coupure de l'Express' [the clipping from 'L'Express'] (dream 83). These 'coupures', respectively 'à l'index', 'dans un texte', 'de l'Express', suggest an insistent play of the signifier around the notion of circumcision, the 'coupure au sexe'. In earlier dreams (17, 19: July–August 1970), the word is used in the sense of denominations of banknotes, 'de grosses coupures'. In dream 19, dollar bills of different denominations are being handled by wrinkled old film-stars from Hollywood Westerns (James Stewart, Henry Fonda): caricaturally idealized father figures associated with the $ sign repeated four times in this text.[26]

The letter Z and its associated notion of 'coupure' become here the centre of an elaborate shuffling of reflected images of the self in its unstable relationship to parents, cultures, lovers and the body, half-suggesting analogies in these various dialogues with multiple Others. Our exploration of this polysemy of the letter Z brought us finally back to Lacan's $, sign of the barred subject, now parodied and platitudinized as the repeated dollar sign. To further emphasize the game-playing whimsy in all this, dream 26 takes its title from the detail of an S-shaped bar in a restaurant: 'Le bar en S'.

The most obviously intertextual reference in this constellation of motifs lies in dream 21, entitled 'S/Z' (September 1970). Perec visits a bookshop with Z: 'Je cherche un titre précis, mais la libraire ne l'a pas'

[24] Perec's father, whose first name was Icek, was commonly called Izie, and this may provide the link between z = 'coupure' in the first section, and Israel in the second. In the final dream (p. 124), Georges is denounced, along with his father, to the S.S. by a merchant who points as evidence to a scar he bears beneath his chin.

[25] See Marcel Benabou, 'Perec et la judéité', *Cahiers Georges Perec*, 1 (Paris: P.O.L., 1985), 15–30.

[26] Those mythologized film-star 'fathers' could be said to be holding the money which, in 'La taille', is the parental heritage in the secret drawer.

[I'm looking for a precise title, but the bookseller hasn't got it]. While browsing, however, he comes across a work compiling the S/Z variations in Balzac, e.g. Balsac/Balzac, Maissé/Maizsé. He recognizes Maissé as a Balzac character,[27] and Maizsé as the name of a Polish village. Once again, we see mobilized the dichotomy of Polish heritage/French literary culture. The obvious, and explicit, reference here is to Roland Barthes's celebrated study of Balzac's *Sarrasine*, published just a few months earlier, and vigorously debated. For Barthes, in this study,

> Z est la lettre de la mutilation: phonétiquement, Z est cinglant à la façon d'un fouet châtieur, d'un insecte érinnyque; graphiquement, jeté par la main, en écharpe, à travers la blancheur égale de la page, parmi les rondeurs de l'alphabet, comme un tranchant oblique et illégal, il coupe, il barre, il zèbre.[28]
>
> Z is the letter of mutilation: phonetically, Z is cutting like a whip of punishment, an avenging insect; graphically, thrown down by hand, sideways, across the even blankness of the page, among the rounded shapes of the alphabet, like an oblique and illegal blade, it cuts, stripes, slashes.

Perec's conception of Z as 'zébrure, coupure, cicatrice' is thus lifted from Barthes. Yet, as so often with Perec's many borrowings, it is naturalized so that it appears entirely to fit its new context. Perec, feeling disempowered by SuZanne, projects onto her the image of the castrating woman which Barthes finds so powerfully present in *Sarrasine*. The bookshop of the dream is the world of the feminine: Perec's companion on the visit, the bookseller, and the author of the book he finds are all female, but his own desire for a 'titre précis' (a recognized identity) is frustrated. Despite the insistent current of underlying anguish, there is a playfulness in this labyrinthine encoding of narrative subjectivity which is destined become a hallmark of later works, particularly *La Vie mode d'emploi*.

This investigation into a few of the patterns and strategies apparent in *La Boutique obscure* has suggested the hybrid nature of these writings, poised between private dream-diary and text for publication, and the different agendas and constraints thus brought into play. It is through the

[27] This would seem to be a dream invention: the name Maissé does not figure in the authoritative list of characters provided in the final volume of the latest Pléiade edition of *La Comédie humaine*.

[28] Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), p. 113. Perec had attended a number of Barthes's seminars in the 1960s.

mediating function of 'secondary revision', figured as theatrical framing, that the writing self seeks to find a synthesis of fidelity to the economy of the dream on the one hand, and an acceptable intelligibility and order on the other. This formal and strategic hybridity is the expressive response to a psychic 'coupure' between unresolved private loss and being-in-the-world. As Lacan wrote: 'Ce qui me constitue comme sujet, c'est ma question' [What constitutes me as subject is my questioning].[29]

The biographical 'subject as question' manifestly takes various forms here: am I a child or an adult? Polish-Jewish or French? Am I Paulette's husband, Suzanne's lover or someone else I can only dream of? Am I the role I am currently playing on the theatre-stage of the self, or do I have another, more 'real' identity behind that, offstage? Drawing on the inner turbulence of this raw material, the project of writing in these dream texts offered a special opportunity for a calculated histrionics of the self, the search for an elusive equilibrium within a form that carried no responsibility of lucidity and coherence. Lucidity and coherence could be present, of course, but disguised and encoded in a game played with the reading Other. Thus the self-narrativizing subject can express its instability through a play of concealment and (apparent) revelation.

In this play of writing, the function of the third self as ringmaster on the stage, censoring and ordering the material, is crucial. As orderer it structures what is shown, while as censor it leaves us the tell-tale trace of the gaps, the absences, which become revelatory in their turn. So the story is told through words and names forgotten, suppressed or (half-) concealed as well as through words uttered and names set down.

This collection constitutes a significant record of what was for Perec a disciplined exercise of writing in a genre which offered special possibilities for registering the constantly shifting refigurations of the self which Lacan characterizes as the domain of the *imaginaire*. And it is we, the readers, who are as a consequence enriched by the multiform fertility and subtlety of the barred subject.

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[29] Lacan, *Ecrits*, p. 299.

THE BOOK AND THE TREE: WRITING THE SELF IN MARGUERITE DURAS'S *LA PLUIE D'ETE*

'C'est moi, la poursuite du vent.'
(M. D., *C'est tout*, 3 mars)

La Pluie d'été, when it appeared in 1990, passed unnoticed, at least by the wider public, despite the tumultuous acclaim enjoyed by Duras since 1984, when she had been awarded the Prix Goncourt for *L'Amant*, having previously missed the same prize in 1950 with *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*.[1] To anyone who does read it, the book seems a-typical 'in the gaiety of its teeming mass of happy children,'[2] just as the film *Les Enfants*[3] from which it derives 'seems quite apart in her work'[4] and is practically never screened. As to the children's book which is behind all of these, *Ah! Ernesto*,[5] it is extremely difficult to find and figures in only a few of the bibliographies of Marguerite Duras. It is thus an almost hidden vein of this writer's output that will interest us here, one at first sight foreign to the autobiographical period which unfolds from *L'Amant* (1984) to *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991), moving through *La Douleur*

[1] In her obituary in *Libération* (Monday 4 March, 1996, p. 32), Claire Devarrieux points out that at that moment *L'Amant* had sold 1,3000,000 copies in the Minuit edition (Paris, 1994), plus a million copies in the Club edition (Paris: France-Loisirs): 'Translated into forty or so languages, it is perhaps the biggest literary success of the post-war period.'

[2] Ibid.

[3] 1985, co-scripted by Jean Mascolo and Jean-Marc Turine.

[4] Aliette Armel, *Marguerite Duras et l'autobiographie* (Paris: Le Castor Astral, 1990), p. 112.

[5] Published by François Ruy-Vidal and Harlin Quist, with graphic presentation by Bernard Bonhomme (Boissy-St-Léger, 1971), 7 pp.

(1985), a series of apparently direct 'confessions' revealing the person of their author.

A great deal has been written around *L'Amant*, in particular as an effect of the 'return of the subject' and of the 'new autobiography' generated within a few years by works such as Nathalie Sarraute's *Enfance* (1983) and Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Romanesques* (*Le Miroir qui revient*, 1984), apparent retractions by writers considered as having eliminated characters, and with them, the author. These new forms of writing the self, which seemed to deconstruct the rules set out by Philippe Lejeune in *Le Pacte autobiographique* (1975), have been at the forefront of critical attention. In *La Pluie d'été*, however, the author eclipses herself in the manner of the Naturalists and says 'I' only in the 'postface' where she presents herself as a witness. The place (Vitry, a suburb of Paris) is foreign to her, she has at one time made a film there, but she gets lost every time she returns. The social environment is no less extraneous to her — that of a large immigrant family (the father from Italy, the mother from somewhere in central Europe) living on the margins of society, on benefit, with illiterate children.

Choosing this book for a study of writing the self, therefore, is rather like reversing Ricœur's formula, 'oneself as another', and asking the question in the form of 'the other as oneself'. I am here taking literally Marguerite Duras's assertion: 'Puisque je suis écrivain, je n'ai pas d'histoire, ou bien j'ai des histoires dans la littérature, mais je n'ai pas d'histoire à proprement parler' [Since I am a writer, I have no story or else I have stories in writing, but I have no history properly speaking].[6] Writing the self, in *La Pluie d'été*, means inventing oneself as a writer and a poet with the help of the archetypal figures of the Book (as represented by the Bible) and the Poet (as represented by Victor Hugo).

In her postface, Marguerite Duras takes up the position of a realist writer, minimizing as much as possible the element of invention in her story. Indeed she claims to be merely the witness to that story, its 'author' only in the medieval sense of the one guaranteeing the authenticity of places and names, even of 'l'histoire d'amour qui court tout au long du livre' [the love story running through the book].[7] The

[6] Quoted by Claire Devarrieux in her obituary, art. cit., p. 32.

[7] *La Pluie d'été* (Paris: P.O.L.,1990), p. 156. Henceforth *PE*, with page references incorporated in the text.

'pact' offered here, while advertising a determination to efface the narrator-novelist, also prevents the reader from interpreting the story by following the classic trail of a novelistic transposition of the authorial self into fictional characters, in whom the author's own features, her life and her thoughts, visibly show through. In this sense, as Gide said long ago, a man is revealed more in his fictions than in his private journal. The person signing her name, then, asserts twice over her absence from *La Pluie d'été*: through the narration, which is impersonal, and through the facts related, which are said not to be of her making. This is, as it were, a purely documentary book:

> Tout en écrivant le livre, j'ai fait une quinzaine de voyages à Vitry. [...] j'ai gardé les noms des musiciens [...]. J'ai aussi gardé la casa des parents. [...] J'oublie: la Seine, je l'ai gardée [...]. J'oublie encore: l'arbre est là. [...] J'oublie encore: les noms des enfants je ne les ai pas inventés. Ni l'histoire d'amour qui court tout au long du livre. (*PE* 155–6)

> While writing the book, I made fifteen or so trips to Vitry. [...] I kept the names of the musicians [...]. I also kept the parents' *casa*. [...] I almost forgot: the river Seine, I kept that [...]. Another thing I forgot: the tree is there too. [...] And another: I didn't invent the names of the children. Or the love story running through the book.

I shall return to the trap involved in this statement, for, while the 'love story' is not invented, nor yet is it explicitly situated in Vitry; the text would have had to say 'their' story if doubt on this point were to be eliminated. By dint of repetition, the story becomes attributable to the children of Vitry. However, all the assertions of faithfulness to things observed bring out clearly the contribution of the author at the level of writing: 'Vitry [...] est le lieu le moins littéraire que l'on puisse imaginer, le moins défini. Je l'ai donc inventé' [Vitry is the least literary place imaginable, the least defined. Therefore I invented it] (*PE* 155).

In respect of what used to be called the imitation of reality, as apparently applicable to Duras given her stance as objective witness-narrator, our contemporaries have shown that mimesis in fact involves invention in the sense that a non-verbal substance cannot be directly transcribed: 'le langage ne peut imiter parfaitement que du langage' [Language can imitate perfectly only what is of the nature of language].[8] This is what we understand when Vitry is said to be 'the

[8] Gérard Genette, 'Frontières du récit', in *Figures II* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), pp. 49–69 (p. 55).

least literary place imaginable' and that it is 'therefore' necessary to invent it. Thus Valery Larbaud made Flaubert the first of modern autobiographers because he had said 'Madame Bovary, c'est moi' [Madame Bovary is me]: 'Il aurait pu dire la même chose de n'importe quel autre personnage de son œuvre, et même de ses paysages: Rouen, c'est moi; Carthage, c'est moi [...] en art, tout est autobiographique, et rien ne l'est' [He might have said the same thing of any other character in his work, and even of his landscapes: Rouen is me, Carthage is me [...] in art, everything and nothing is autobiographical].[9] Which means that all literary writing is writing of the self, because it is invention. Vitry will therefore henceforth be a literary place, just like Flaubert's Rouen or Balzac's Guérande.

It is easy to put that self through the famous 'disparition élocutoire' [elocutionary disappearance] of which Mallarmé spoke. What results is, invisible and present everywhere in his creation, the transcendental subject which Seán Burke detects first in high Romanticism, in Keats, then in Flaubert, and which is said to find its original model in Kant.[10] The Vitry that has become literary, as invented by Duras, exists only in her text and through her authorial guarantee. Moreover, she warns any reader who would like to go and verify the reality of these facts, like the young Proust dreaming of going to see the poppy field painted by Manet, that Vitry has changed. The parents' *casa* has burned down, and the tree is now surrounded by high walls: 'on ne verra plus désormais que le haut de son feuillage et de cette façon il ne sera plus regardé par personne' [all that can be seen henceforth is the crown of its foliage, and so it will be seen by nobody] (*PE* 155). Thus the author lays claim both to the status of truthful witness, having invented nothing if invention means novelistic falsehood, and to that of inventor, in the sense of discoverer of a world that has already disappeared and which, without her, would have no existence. The figure of the author is very clearly drawn, then, as that of the creator who, by her writing, gives definition and contour to shapeless reality.

First, then, the word. 'Genesis', each time begun anew, is not merely

[9] Valery Larbaud, preface to Ramón Gómez de la Serna, *La Veuve blanche et noire*, trans. by Jean Cassou (Paris: Ed. du Sagittaire, 1924), pp. 6–7.

[10] See 'Introduction: Reconstructing the Author', in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern: A Reader*, ed. by Seán Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. xv–xxx.

an emblematic metaphor for the written book as such, but, as it turns out, an active figuration of *La Pluie d'été*. The postface finishes with a powerful reversion to poetic fiction: 'Le livre brûlé, je l'ai inventé. M. D.' [The burned book is something I did invent. M. D.].

This book is the Bible. 'Inventing' it can be interpreted in several ways, two of which seem to me essential. Throughout the story, Ernesto undertakes readings of a page of Ecclesiastes, readings comparable to the paraphrases of the Scriptures which, in the seventeenth century, represented one of the great poetic genres of the religious spirit, part biblical translation and part biblical commentary. 'Invention' may also be situated in the burning which symbolizes the holocaust: the 'martyred' book, the sight of which makes the children cry, soon takes on the whole burden of the Jewish people, up to and including Auschwitz. Duras-Donnadieu (the initials she uses increasingly at the end of her life somewhat blur out the pseudonym) thus places herself among the poet-prophets, such as the author of *Les Misérables*.

Like Victor Hugo, Duras in *La Pluie d'été* accords herself the status of a political poet, speaking for the people but also taking support from the Bible (while averse to its religious proclamation). Whether the similarities we are about to examine are conscious or not is unimportant in relation to a concerted development, the sense of which will be clarified as we follow it. A well known poem of *Les Contemplations* evokes the carefree childhood of Victor Hugo and his brothers 'Aux Feuillantines'.[11] Playing in the convent's garden and lofts, they discover one day, out of reach, a mysterious black book which they eventually get their hands on: it is a Bible, in which they read and reread stories that hold them spellbound, about Joseph, Ruth and Booz, and the Good Samaritan. While playing in a 'lean-to' shed, the children of *La Pluie d'été* will also discover a book, 'un livre très épais recouvert de cuir noir' [a very thick book bound in black leather], which they are able to read only in fragments because it is partially destroyed. This constitutes the pivotal event in the story. Ernesto cannot read, yet tells his brothers and sisters, 'les brothers et les sisters', as they are styled, what he deciphers in the book. This extraordinary fact sets off a long debate on the theme of whether

[11] See Book V, and 'En marche', Book X. This poem used to figure in most anthologies used in the first four years of the French secondary school curriculum.

school is useful, a theme also treated in another autobiographical poem by Victor Hugo, 'Ce qui se passait aux Feuillantines vers 1813'.[12] Here Hugo relates an episode from his childhood: at the age of eleven, he was living at Les Feuillantines under the protection of 'Trois maîtres: un jardin, un vieux prêtre et ma mère' [Three masters: a garden, an old priest and my mother]. One day — 'it was summer' — the headmaster of a secondary school came to advise the mother to put the child to school so as to guarantee him a proper education. This character is an ugly and stupid pedant, yet his words, 'Il est indispensable! — il convient! — il importe!' ['You must! — it is right! — it is important!'], trouble the mother, who hesitates before finally listening to the voices of the beautiful garden vaunting the lessons of nature: 'Laisse-nous cet enfant!' [Leave us this child!]. True, we are a long way from Vitry in this edenic enclosure where the priest, 'tout nourri de Tacite et d'Homère' [steeped in Tacitus and Homer], is careful to maintain a harmonious balance between the freedom of days spent in the countryside and the reading of ancient poets. Nevertheless, Duras's carefree children, 'brothers and sisters', embody the same rejection of constraint, the same derisive dismissal of the ideals of school-based learning and disciplined education. The 'pedant', still an entirely classical figure in Hugo, has a new look. He is more likeable, probably because he himself is not very convinced of the rightness of the principles which it is his function to represent, but his discourse is identical: 'Schooling is compulsory, Sir, COMPULSORY' (*PE* 82). The argument from authority does not stand up to the non-conformity of either of the families. Victor Hugo's account is indirect; he is replying to the questions which his own children ask of the poet and these children are inveterate questioners, mouths 'disant toujours pourquoi' [forever asking why]. Hugo the father admits that these questions throw his 'systems' into disarray. His constructions of thought are imperilled, not by clever dialecticians, but by naive dabblers who wish 'de chaque chose obscure pour moi-même,/Connaître le vrai sens et le mot décisif' [of everything obscure to myself/To know the true sense and the decisive word]. It is this same play of childish questions and formulas which directs the course of Duras's book, made up principally of dialogues

[12] In *Les Rayons et les ombres* (1840); this poem, dated May 1839, is very long and much less often reprinted in school manuals, perhaps by reason of its content!

in which the 'well-read' characters, the primary school teacher and the journalist, will never have the upper hand. Preserved from knowledge and from the conformism of a society that has excluded them, the children of *La Pluie d'été* disturb reason; they seek to think out the world with means that seem to us incongruous, with much more emotion and boldness than common sense. This approach is designed to rout all our habits of thought; it tends and intends to disturb.

At the origin of this book, as already noted, there lies a children's book. This is the text reworked in a key scene of *La Pluie d'été* (*PE* 61–9), the interview between the parents and the schoolmaster, in which Ernesto's refusal to go back to school, because 'there they teach you things you don't know', leaves his parents at a loss and the schoolmaster speechless:

> — Qu'est-ce qu'on va en faire? dit le papa.
> — C'est y vrai que ça saura lire un jour?... demande la maman.
> — Lire et compter?... dit le papa.
> — Oui lire et compter?... et aller et venir ?... Conduire et pas?...
> Boire et manger?... Travailler, travailler, travailler encore?... Se tromper et pas?... et tout leur machin et tout leur Saint Frusquin?...
> Le maître la regarde avec des yeux vides. Le papa d'Ernesto est au garde-à-vous.
> — Hélas! dit le maître avec beaucoup d'emphase, hélas! madame: OUI[13]
>
> 'What'll we do with him?' says Pa.
> 'Reckon im'll larn ter read one day?' asks Ma.
> 'Read and count?' says Pa.
> 'Ay, read and count? And come and go? Drive and not drive? Drink and eat? Work, work and work some more? And all their thingummy and all their Saint Frumpo?'
> The master looked at her, empty-eyed. Ernesto's Dad was bolt upright. 'Alas!' said the master with emphatic majesty, 'Alas, *yes*, madame.'

The children's book is clearly subversive, since, instead of encouraging the young reader to follow compulsory schooling, it suggests basically that lessons are of no use at all. Instead of the reasons proclaimed vain by the master's vacant gaze, the illegally truanting pupil is given arguments of civic morality ('school is compulsory'). Childish unreason is a subversive weapon in *Ah! Ernesto*; in *La Pluie d'été* it receives reinforcement from Ecclesiastes, and very precisely from the words attributed to the wise man: 'Et

[13] *Ah! Ernesto*, p. 5.

voici. J'ai compris que tout est vanité. Vanité des Vanités. Et Poursuite du Vent' [Behold. I have seen that all is Vanity. Vanity of vanities. And striving after wind]. The tone is set from the first page. The initial anecdote serves as a key to the main story, the discovery of the Bible, which is introduced as simple reduplication: 'Une fois, il y avait eu une autre histoire de livre dans cette famille' [Once in the family there had been another business with a book] (*PE* 12). The first book-discovery happens down by the dustbins, and relates to the *La Vie de Georges Pompidou* in the collection *Vies de Gens célèbres*. The parents, who are layabouts and mostly drunk, read and reread this story with great excitement, preferring it to novels because 'le père se retrouvait dans la vie de Georges Pompidou et la mère dans celle de sa femme') [the father recognized himself in Georges Pompidou's life and the mother in his wife's] (*PE* 51–6). A burlesque effect is created as a lofty reference, Pompidou's life, assimilated by the very vagueness of a series title into the classical tradition of 'lives' of 'great men', is brought into contact with a base reference, the lower class represented by a family set at furthest remove from the great and good of this world. The same phenomenon apparently occurs when, now reading the Bible, the family identifies with the kings of Israel. But here the reduplication no longer has the same sense. We can compare the prince and the pauper and laugh at their differences and their common characteristics — which is a frequent motif in comedy; but the sacred and absolute character of the Biblical books gives a quite different dimension to the identification. From parody, we pass over into allegory. Between the first anecdote and the ensuing story, there is a gap through which the narrator, without appearing to do so, leaves the world of the novel and enters that of the poem.

The reader is no longer quite sure whether he is dealing with a realist, even documentary-type novel, surrounded as he is by so many precise and sordid details placing it in the recognizable world of the modern city suburb, and, more realistically still, in a series of named and locatable places: Vitry, its port (Port-à-l'Anglais), its motorway (actually the Nationale 7), and so on. All these elements are introduced, however, by the allusion to the set opening formula of fairy tales in 'Une fois...' [Once upon a time...], which announces the *merveilleux*, the marvellous, just where we had been expecting documentary truth. The deliberate mixing-up of signs is maintained throughout, as though the whole book obeyed a child's perspective,

deconstructing the 'systems' that stand as landmarks to thought. The narrative indeed works to abolish time and bring together the end and the beginning. We are in both the immemorial time of the Bible and the real present of a French city suburb approaching the end of the twentieth century. The fabulous acceleration of Ernesto's learning process, as he passes in a few weeks from illiteracy to completing all levels of University education, highlights diegetically the negation of realist constraints which the description of the conditions of life (municipal housing, Catholic Aid centres, daily potato-peeling) seemed to wish to respect. As for space, it might at first appear restricted to the realist unity of place defined by Vitry, the *casa* and a few short breaks in Paris. A closer look reveals that it is not only enlarged by the parents' respective pasts (Italy in the case of the father, and central Europe as far as the Caucasus in that of the mother), but takes on yet another dimension through the image of the tree (of which more later) and the implications of the book's title. The title is justified only in the last part of the novel, in the final scene separated from the epilogue by a single paragraph:

> Ça avait été pendant cette nuit-là, pendant la longue *Neva* pleurée de la mère que tomba sur Vitry la première pluie d'été. Elle tomba sur tout le centre-ville, le fleuve, l'autoroute détruite, l'arbre, les sentes et les pentes des enfants, les fauteuils navrants de la fin du monde, forte et drue comme un flot de sanglots. (*PE* 151)
>
> It was during that night, during the mother's long weeping *Neva*, that the first summer rain fell on Vitry. It fell on the whole town centre, the river, the ruined motorway, the paths and tracks, the desolate end-of-the-world armchairs, hard and straight like a flood of sobbing.

To anyone who knows the climate of Vitry, this 'first summer rain', promised by the title and suddenly pouring down to drown the whole novelistic landscape, plays an unlikely dramatic role. To any reader referring back to Marguerite Duras's work, this summer rain is easily recognizable as the monsoon. This we must read as a warning sign that the story is situated in Marguerite Duras's world, and nowhere else.

'Le livre brûlé, je l'ai inventé.' This book is the generating centre of the whole of *La Pluie d'été*. The discovery of the book and the reading of it are the events which constitute the basic weave of the plot; the book's 'martyrdom' makes it an emblem of the fate of the Jews during the war, and, beyond this, of all human miseries. Its

teaching opens a process of questioning on the relations between man and the world, knowledge and happiness, guilt and innocence. It is, in every sense, the book to be deciphered; and the very process of decipherment sends us back to the activity of reading and writing, thus confirming that the literature of the century is, to quote Linda Hutcheon, 'narcissistic'.[14]

Two successive narratives attempt to show how Ernesto, who cannot read, manages to pick up something of the book discovered by the children. The first, external and apparently purely factual, is the narrator's story, while the second, an attempt to explain his progress, is Ernesto's own story. The first narrative evokes a sort of mystic initiation: Ernesto enters a phase of silence for some days, then comes to contemplate the tree, always alone and speaking about it only to his sister, until he finally confides to his brothers and sisters what he has understood of the book. The tree too is described in two phases, first as a fine, vigorous plant, with a trunk as straight as 'un trait sur une page nue' [a line on a naked page] and a luxuriant, shiny foliage, so dense that nothing grows around it. It is surrounded by railings and cannot be approached. 'Il aurait pu paraître ordinaire,' we are told, 'on aurait pu ne pas le remarquer. Mais une fois qu'on l'avait vu il ne pouvait plus sortir de l'esprit' [It might have looked ordinary, people might not have looked at it. But once you had seen it, you couldn't get it out of your mind] (*PE* 14). It is a desert tree: 'sous ce feuillage le jardin était un désert' [under the tree, the garden was a desert]; and the days Ernesto spends contemplating the tree suggest a hermit's ascesis. The tree plays an essential role in the child's accession to knowledge, and the second description gives, or rather suggests, the explanation:

> Cet arbre était sans âge, indifférent aux saisons, aux latitudes, dans une solitude sans recours. Sans doute n'était-il plus nommé dans les livres de ce pays ici. Peut-être ne l'était-il plus nulle part. (*PE* 14)
>
> It was an ageless tree, indifferent to the seasons and latitudes, in an irremediable isolation. It was doubtless no longer named in books from around here. Perhaps not in books from anywhere.

From these features, we can guess what the children sense obscurely, namely that the tree has a close link with the book, for it can only be

[14] *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980).

the tree of knowledge, which God had forbidden to Adam and Eve. The tree of Genesis, which begins again 'around here' with Ernesto and Jeanne, brings about the fall, incest, separation and death, as though every family were destined to repeat ancestral history:

> Les enfants avaient écouté avec une attention entière ce qu'avait fait le Roi d'Israël. Ils avaient demandé où ils étaient maintenant ces gens-là, les Rois d'Israël.
>
> Ernesto avait dit qu'ils étaient morts.
>
> Comment ? avaient demandé les enfants.
>
> Ernesto avait dit: gazés et brûlés. [...]
>
> Et puis Ernesto leur avait demandé de ne pas oublier, les derniers rois d'Israël, à Vitry, c'étaient leurs parents. (*PE* 57–9)

> The children had listened with rapt attention to what the King of Israel had done. They had asked where those people, the Kings of Israel, were now.
>
> Ernesto had said they had died.
>
> 'How?' the children had asked.
>
> Ernesto had said: 'Gassed and burned.' [...]
>
> And then Ernesto had asked them not to forget: the last kings of Israel, in Vitry, were their parents.

There recurs here the phenomenon of identification whose model was given at the start of the book by the parents recognizing themselves in the lives of Pompidou and his wife. This time, however, we no longer smile because the children have actually lost the edenic — scandalously edenic — state which they had lived in up to that point, with their laughter, their pink and golden-blond good-looks, their unawareness of age. Now we see them too joining the unending chain of sufferings inflicted on humanity.

Pedagogues speak of the acquisition of reading as a salutary step towards the dignity of civilized man. The mother of Marguerite Duras is described by her biographers as one of the 'hussars of the Republic', unable to rest until their pupils could read, devoting their energy, time, and faith to the task. *La Pluie d'été* seems indifferent to this educational zeal in which the Donnadieu children were probably brought up. It is possible to interpret Ernesto's refusal to go to school as a rejection of social dragooning: school educates, forms citizens, i.e. prepares children to submit later to the unjust forces of the body politic. One can also read in it an assertion sometimes supported by classical philosophy: one never learns anything except what one already knows. There is no miracle in learning to read by oneself, with or without school; everyone will manage it eventually ('Hélas,

madame, oui!'). But reading as discovered by Ernesto is not at all like what our institutions designate — and what society demands for all — under the name of literacy. For this is a form of reading which produces meaning and thereby closely resembles writing:

> Au début il disait qu'il avait essayé de la façon suivante: il avait donné à tel dessin de mot, tout à fait arbitrairement, un premier sens. Puis au deuxième mot qui avait suivi, il avait donné un autre sens, mais en raison du premier sens supposé au premier mot, et cela jusqu'à ce que la phrase tout entière veuille dire quelque chose de sensé. Ainsi avait-il compris que la lecture c'était une espèce de déroulement continu dans son propre corps d'une histoire par soi inventée. (*PE* 16)
>
> At first he would say that he had tried as follows: quite arbitrarily, he had given the contour of some word a first meaning. Then, to a next word, he had given another meaning, this one in line with the first meaning associated with the first word, and so on until the entire sentence meant something sensible. In this way he had understood that reading was a sort of continuous unfolding, in his own body, of a story invented by himself.

I shall not dwell on the technical aspects of Ernesto's account, except to note its astonishingly non-infantile, deliberate character, its mastery, which proves that decipherment proceeds from intelligence and not from rote-learning. From being illiterate, Ernesto has changed into a well-read child. The school left by Jeanne after four days offered only variations of sounds, such as 'Papa punit Popol' [Papa punishes Polly and Paul], a sentence whose 'true version' (*PE* 120) she subsequently discloses to the journalist. True reading is invention, the creation of a continuity between words which constitutes meaning where before there were only isolated fragments. The mutilated book is accidentally fragmentary, but the intrinsic discontinuity of the written word is fundamental: meaning cannot emerge from a 'full' text, for without fissures reading cannot gain a purchase. The story teaches in abbreviated form what learned twentieth-century linguists and critics have revealed and what Duras will resume in a lapidary formula: 'Et lire c'était écrire' [And reading was writing].[15] Ernesto, however paradoxical his experience appears, is repeating something many writers have described as their initiation into literature. The story read between the words becomes the reader's own story: a making-over in which one also comes to invent oneself. Hence the rebirth of what was erased and forgotten, as proven by the final chorus

[15] *Ecrire* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. Folio, 1996; first publ. 1993), p. 36.

of *La Pluie d'été* where the mother's voice joins in with the recitation of the text of Ecclesiastes as reinvented by Ernesto. She has rediscovered the words of the song of the *Neva*, which accompanies the happy family evenings, a song sung in an archaic language going back to the origins of her history:

> Ce n'était pas du russe les paroles retrouvées, c'était un mélange d'un parler caucasien et d'un parler juif, d'une douceur d'avant les guerres, les charniers, les montagnes de morts. (*PE* 147)
>
> The words that had come back were not Russian, but a mixture of Caucasian and Jewish dialect, soft words hailing from a time before wars, mass graves, and the mountains of the dead.

Ernesto, then, has helped his mother to retrieve her history, and enabled his family, rebuilt amid the alternating sounds of his own recitation and his mother's singing, to quit the frightening, mythical world of the novel-as-poem and enter into the banality of ordinary lives. The rain has come and drowned the contours of this literary world, whereupon the narrative picks up in the mode of epilogue: 'Au dire de certaines gens, Ernesto ne serait pas mort...' [Some say Ernesto isn't really dead...] (*PE* 151–2). The epilogue, written in the conditional, as though there were no desire to endorse the accuracy of information which is only hearsay, underlines by contrast the conspicuously veridical character of the fable. The text does not say explicitly that the two children, Jeanne and Ernesto, are dead; the scene directs the reader towards the silence of the children stretched out on the ground, a silence preceded by the last words of the king:

> Et puis un jour dit Ernesto, il lui était venu le désir ardent de vivre une vie de pierre. [...]
> Une fois, dit enfin Ernesto, il ne regretta pas.
> Plus rien il regretta (*PE* 150–51).
>
> And then one day, said Ernesto, there had come to him the burning desire to live a life of stone. [...]
> Once, said Ernesto finally, he didn't regret.
> He didn't regret anything again.

The inert bodies that Jeanne and her brother have become, with the ensuing image of the first summer rain falling heavily on Vitry, may once again remind us of Hugo, this time in the last chapter of *Les Misérables*, entitled 'L'Herbe cache et la pluie efface' [The grass

hides and the rain washes away]. Here the poet suggests that the whole of his novel is the development of an epitaph on an anonymous tombstone, some lines of verse 'written in pencil' by 'a hand' and erased by the rain and dust.

I hope to have shown that, far from being 'atypical' of Marguerite Duras's last years, *La Pluie d'été* operates, on the contrary, entirely within a system of writing in which the fiction serves to give shape to a deliberately and exclusively literary existence. The writer does not seek to utter a personal truth or to recount herself, even if her readers recognize recurrent themes in her work that they might be tempted to take as 'biographemes'. The enterprise is of another order; it is a matter of exploring, through a story, the process of writing, its mysterious and sacred character, the solitude to which those who practise it are dedicated. The principal theme, immediately announced, is that of the book, that is, in the abstruse words of Ernesto related by Jeanne, the entry into 'l'inconnu du tout de la vie' ['the unknown of the whole of life'] (*PE* 15). The very elevated subjects tackled by ignorant children cannot be formulated in an innocent way. And yet, God, knowledge, passion: are these subjects that any man or woman can treat clearly, even the most intelligent and learned? Marguerite Duras claims not to have invented the fact that the school is called Blaise Pascal, but she has not chosen haphazardly the page from Ecclesiastes that proclaims the vanity of all human greatness. To choose to have this page read and paraphrased by an illiterate child who becomes capable of acquiring in a few weeks all the knowledge available to the University is tantamount to placing reading and writing among the incommensurable values — bordering on madness or genius. A writer is nothing if her project is not overweening, if her writing does not compete with the Scriptures.

Following *La Pluie d'été*, *Ecrire* evokes the 'les grandes lectures' [the most influential books read] of the writer's life and proclaims: 'Le Texte des textes, c'est l'Ancien Testament' [the text of texts is the Old Testament]; and in the next paragraph: 'Et lire, c'était écrire' [And to read was to write].[16] Duras's examination of her own situation as a writer seems to flow from the story of Ernesto, and the link becomes still stronger in the writer's last book, which appeared a few months before her death:

[16] *Ecrire*, pp. 35–6.

Le 10 février [...]
Vanité des vanités.
Tout est vanité et poursuite du vent.
Ces deux phrases donnent toute la littérature de la terre.
Vanité des vanités, oui.
Ces deux phrases à elles seules ouvrent le monde: les choses, les vents, les cris des enfants, le soleil mort pendant ces cris.
Que le monde aille à sa perte.
Vanité des vanités.
Tout est vanité et poursuite du vent.
Le 3 mars
C'est moi la poursuite du vent.[17]

10 February [...]
Vanity of vanities.
All is vanity and a striving after wind.
These two sentences give all the world's literature.
Vanity of vanities, yes.
These two sentences on their own open up the world: things, winds, children's cries, the sun dead during their crying.
Let the world go towards its ruin.
Vanity of vanities.
All is vanity and striving after wind.
3 March
The striving after wind is me.

Marguerite Duras died exactly a year later, on 3 March 1996.

The autobiographer can write the whole of a life, it is said, except for his or her own death. Marguerite Duras wrote her *ultima verba* in a last book, the title of which, *C'est tout*, clearly asserts that the monument is finished. The coincidence of dates between 3 March 1995 and 3 March 1996 adds legendary force, as sometimes happens in the lives of great writers, to our epigraph. The 'vanity' of the Ecclesiast is the traditional translation of the Hebrew *hébél*, meaning 'mist,' 'breath, 'wind', hence in Hebrew 'poetry', an image of the illusory being of things. The identity affirmed ('c'est moi') is established not with the light, volatile breath the Romans called *anima*, which can epitomize poetry or soul, but with the pursuit of something lacking in consistency. The subject thus defined is neither exactly

[17] *C'est tout*, (Paris: P.O.L., 1995), pp. 30–31.

consistent nor inconsistent, neither empirical nor transcendental, but movement, trajectory in the world. For a writer, the trajectory is plotted by books, and writing is the trace of movement. The last books of Marguerite Duras seek to fuse the subject of writing and the empirical subject into an identity symbolized by the signature M.D.

These initials are capable of referring both to the pseudonym Duras and to the patronym Donnadieu. They perhaps also echo the distinguishing style conferred by literary reviews such as the *NRF* on 'in-house' writers. By her signature, Marguerite Duras is declaring both her belonging to the world of letters and the fusion into a single entity of the individual, Donnadieu, and the author, Duras. La *Pluie d'été* confirms both projects. The empirical self is not thereby abolished, but rather is sublimated. We have seen that the work of sublimation (the 'poetic alchemy') functions through intertextuality, parody, paraphrase, rewriting. To use Hugo's childhood stories, his discovery of the Bible, his questionings about the universe which disturb adult thought, and his poeticization of the poor, is to set oneself up as the great poet's rival: not by imitating his language, which belongs to another century, but by adopting his viewpoint as a thinker conversant with the infinite. The paraphrases from Ecclesiastes constitute in themselves an exercise in high poetry. For their fictional author Ernesto, their function is to bring ignorant young children to meditate on lofty themes, and to lead them, according to the curse read in Genesis, to suffering and death.

If we enquire how the 'I' of Marguerite Duras is personally involved in this story, we may reply that in it she invests a disenchanted wisdom. 'C'est moi la poursuite du vent': a royal road, if we recall that the words of Ecclesiastes were for a long time attributed to Solomon, but travelled by an anonymous voice, since the author of this text is designated merely as a 'man of the assembly'. The identification between the selves of Duras-Donnadieu operates through the interweaving of textual links between the many books published in the last period of her life. We may recall briefly: the recurrent incest between brother and sister, the magnificent and terrible mother, the memory of the holocaust, and the extraordinary summer rain that transforms the motorway into a Ganges or a Mekong delta. The circulation of motifs between *La Pluie d'été* and the explicitly autobiographical texts can be read in the recurrences of

'L'Aviateur anglais' in *Ecrire*.[18] Just as there is a real Vitry that had nevertheless to be invented, so the 'I' must be invented to become visible. Duras does not seek to wear a mask or to make herself invisible (as the avowals of *L'Amant* show), but to constitute herself as nomadic movement, a figure of ever uncertain contour (as is seen in the comparison between *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*). What is it, fundamentally, if not fear of death, that immobilizes and petrifies us?

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[18] In this text, the controlling image of the martyred trees, killed by fire, takes over from the old burned and blackened book of *La Pluie d'été*.

FROM *CREOLITE* TO *DIVERSALITE*: THE POSTCOLONIAL SUBJECT IN PATRICK CHAMOISEAU'S *TEXACO*

The Martinican author Patrick Chamoiseau is best known not only for his major novel, *Texaco*,[1] which won the Prix Goncourt in 1992, but also for the forceful polemical writings in which he — alone or in collaboration with colleagues — elaborates a literary aesthetics of 'Créolité'.[2] His novels are therefore often held up as examples of his commitment to a specifically Creole literary and cultural project. The present study seeks to go beyond this view. By investigating his concept of the subject, we shall reach beyond Chamoiseau's specific cultural agenda in order to suggest that in *Texaco* he in fact elaborates a political-ethical vision which is fundamental to the sense of self in any culture.

In order to assess *Texaco*'s representation of the subject we shall make particular reference to three characters who can be seen as expressing Chamoiseau's vision, beginning with the principal narrator, Marie-Sophie Laborieux. Through a *narration* of her own and her family's *histoire*, she recounts the slow progress of the Creole people away from the plantations and countryside to which their African ancestors were consigned by slavery, in order to establish themselves

[1] Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. Folio, 1992). Henceforth *T*, with page references incorporated in the text. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

[2] See Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau, *Eloge de la Créolité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989); Confiant and Chamoiseau, *Lettres Créoles: Tracées antillaises et continentales de la littérature, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane, Haïti, 1635–1975* (Paris: Hatier, 1991); and Chamoiseau, *Ecrire en pays dominé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

beside the White and Mixed-Race Martinicans in the coveted 'En-Ville', the urban environment which, for Creoles, '[a tenu] lieu de flambeau dans la nuit close des chaînes' [glowed like a beacon in the dark night of their chains] (*T* 223).[3] On the outskirts of Fort-de-France, Marie-Sophie herself founds the Creole 'Quartier' of Texaco, so called because of its proximity to the oil depot.

Marie-Sophie's text is interrupted by (amongst others) 'Notes' written by a second key character, the 'Urbaniste', who is a significant figure in Marie-Sophie's own *histoire*. He is the town-planning official sent to arrange Texaco's obliteration: but instead, after listening to Marie-Sophie's testimony, he undergoes a conversion from a Metropolitan to a Creole ideal of urban construction, finally saving Texaco rather than razing it and earning the symbolic nickname of 'le Christ'. He too is represented as an influential paradigm of Chamoiseau's ideal subject.

In addition, Marie-Sophie attracts the respectful interest of a third character, the 'Marqueur de paroles' named Chamoiseau, who gradually emerges as the *destinataire* of her *récit*. The Marqueur himself becomes the narrator in a final chapter following Marie-Sophie's death, thus explicitly turning her *narration* into an event within the *histoire* recounted by him. The Marqueur thus maintains overall control of the text and is able to have the last word on the enterprise.

Chamoiseau and the Colonial Legacy

Martinique is clearly, in Chamoiseau's work, to be understood as fundamentally a (post)colonial society programmed by hierarchical relationships between all things Creole and French. Countless postcolonial theorists have dealt with the place of the subject within this type of relationship, but so many of even the most recent studies remain indebted to the seminal work of Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon that it is worth very briefly outlining here some principal points of their analysis.

For both Memmi and Fanon, the structure governing relations between the colonizer and the colonized becomes imprinted on the

[3] The terms *narration*, *histoire* and *récit* are used in Genette's sense. See Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), pp. 65–278.

individual psyche of the colonized, so that he[4] personally suffers from an inferiority complex associated with his own culture and race. Memmi further insists that the identity constructed and projected 'en bloc' onto his entire race by the colonizer robs the colonized of his individuality; Fanon asserts that the Black subject who has been taught to seek models of all that is desirable in an Other who is White becomes incapable of identifying with anything in his own make-up and background. For both writers, this undermining of the sense of self leads to a kind of splitting in the subordinated subject. For Memmi, such are the pressures to identify either with the colonizer or with the colonizer's myth of the colonized that, in the end, 'tel est le drame de l'homme-produit et victime de la colonisation: il n'arrive presque jamais à coïncider avec lui-même' [such is the drama of man as product and victim of colonization: he almost never manages to coincide with himself].[5] As for Fanon, it is one of the premises of his work that the colonized, whose models of all that is acceptable and positive are embodied in Whiteness, is forced to compensate for the apparent emptiness, or lack of self, which arises from his Blackness with White postures or 'masks' that only further deny and undermine his own subjectivity.[6]

It is clear, mostly from his polemical writing but also in his autobiography and novels, that Chamoiseau is acquainted with the theoretical perspectives to which Fanon and Memmi's work has given rise. Before moving on to wider and more original analyses, it will be useful to examine how far *Texaco* conforms to the leading features of these perspectives.

There can be no doubt that *Texaco*'s principal narrator, Marie-Sophie, has an acute awareness of her own identity and character, and a strong sense of self. She readily differentiates herself from others at an individual level, for example, by pointing to (and indulging) her own 'goût de vivre au rire' [pleasure in living on laughter] (*T* 56). She also acknowledges the tenacity which drives her to conquer her adversaries (*T* 296), in part thanks to 'une aptitude à crier fort à crier longtemps' [an ability to holler loud and long] (*T* 303).

Yet if individuality, the sense of self, and innate personal

[4] Both refer to a male subject.

[5] *Portrait du colonisé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), p. 154.

[6] *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil, coll. Points, 1995; first publ. 1952).

characteristics are indeed presented as an essential given of the subject in *Texaco*, they provoke remarkably little explicit reflexive analysis. There are in the text no examples of prolonged introspective searchings for the essence of an individual psyche; nor is there any sense of the cultural or psychological 'splitting' of the postcolonial subject which dogs both the fictional and the theorized subjects of Memmi or Fanon. Marie-Sophie and the majority of characters in her *histoire* are in no way preoccupied by a need to question the nature of their culture, nor troubled by any doubt as to whether to reject it. Even the more scholarly Urbaniste, abandoning the Metropolitan values in which he has been trained for the fundamental cultural truths of his own people, simply comes across in his Notes as a subject reaching ever firmer conclusions about his collective culture and personal views.

In *Texaco*, the sense of identity or selfhood does not emerge through narrow self-reflection, but rather, as we shall see, as the subject of verbs, the agent of action, for although the model subjects of *Texaco* do not suffer the splitting of the self we might expect, the problem of subordinate identity does still exist for them. A brief examination of Marie-Sophie's relationship with authority will further confirm this since, as we have already noted, colonial structures are hierarchical ones in which European culture and values are seen as authoritative and superior. This is of course more than a metaphor: in Martinique, a French Département d'Outre-Mer, authority of all kinds is genuinely and overwhelmingly modelled on the Metropolitan.

The most obvious focus of relations between the Creole individual and authority in the plot of the novel is Marie-Sophie's struggle to establish Texaco, since the Quartier is in many ways a central symbol of Creole identity in the text: Creole culture is expressed in its peculiar architecture, its location and its social structures; and Marie-Sophie herself entertains an especially intimate relationship with it not only as its founder but because, during her fight to see it established, she adopts the word 'Texaco' as a secret name to protect her from harm and fortify her for the fray. In founding Texaco, Marie-Sophie confronts first the White ('béké') owner of the land she has chosen to settle, a representative of the original colonial power structure; and then, when the Quartier grows bigger, she challenges the representative of the new, bureaucratic authority in the shape of the Town Council of Fort-de-France. In each of these opponents, Marie-Sophie encounters

revealing Metropolitan evaluations of herself and her project. The Town Hall, for instance, claims that Texaco's population should be relocated for reasons of public health and environmental aesthetics, thus requiring Texaco to conform to Metropolitan norms of 'l'ordre public' [public order] (*T* 19).

In Marie-Sophie's defiant rejection of such projections of her — and of Texaco — as inferior and undesirable, her defence of the physical site of Texaco is a clear metaphor for a refusal to allow the Metropolitan simply to evacuate the Creole from its scheme of things. On the contrary, Marie-Sophie positively demands recognition of the Creole's existence through action designed to assert her — and Texaco's — *difference*. An observation by Homi Bhabha about Fanon could equally be applied here: 'The demand of identification — that is, to be *for* an Other — entails the representation of the subject in the differentiating order of otherness.'[7] The invitation for Marie-Sophie and Texaco to identify with the colonizer is, in other words, firmly declined.

This assertion of difference gives rise, naturally, to a certain emphasis on the play of opposites in the text. For instance, not only is the Town Hall located at the heart of power in the affluent 'centre-ville' while Texaco sprawls miserably around the periphery of the town, but the authorities' chief desire — to plan, order, and subjugate the land — is in total opposition to the organic, chaotic growth of the Quartier créole. This contrast between centre and periphery, order and disorder, is echoed by others, such as the opposition between the Town Hall's reliance on the written word and Marie-Sophie's ready recourse to the spoken one. In this environment of oppositional challenges, the refusal of both an 'inferior' colonized identity and a 'desirable' colonizing one is shown to be successful in the ultimate triumph of Creole culture and values, which is signalled when Marie-Sophie's Texaco — a properly Creole space adapted not for the exploitation and profit of a single individual as in the past but for communal living in harmony with the land (*T* 407) — displaces the béké and reclaims the area for a class of Martinicans formerly excluded from the town (*T* 107). Most importantly perhaps, Marie-Sophie finally succeeds in having Texaco legitimized by the Town Hall, which at last officially recognizes the Quartier's existence and

[7] *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 45.

provides it with services, including a written identity in addresses, city maps and signposts. This victory is of course also commented upon and sanctioned in the contributions of the Urbaniste, whose status as privileged witness and convert enhances his testimony. Calling for a form of planning that recognizes and valorizes the true identity of the 'Ville créole', he underlines how essential difference is to the collective and individual sense of values and therefore also to the sense of identity. He realizes that he cannot eradicate the chaotic Quartier, for Texaco, in all its difference, 'provenait du plus loin de nous-mêmes' [Texaco sprang from deep within us] (*T* 212).

And yet by the end of the novel it is clear that neither Marie-Sophie nor the Urbaniste aspires to see the Creole population simply replace the present occupants in the heart of the town, establishing their own culture as the superior 'norm'. The Urbaniste rejects the hierarchical value system implied in static binary oppositions and looks instead to creativity as a way forward: 'l'urbaniste ne choisit plus entre l'ordre et le désordre, la beauté et la laideur; désormais il s'érige en artiste' [the town-planner has no longer to choose between order and disorder, beauty and ugliness; now he is established as an artist] (*T* 236). Thus the pattern of oppositions which marks Marie-Sophie's struggle is seen to be temporary, and ceases to function in the same way after her victory. It is not simply cancelled out, nor even assimilated seamlessly into some higher, harmonious synthesis at the end of the tale: but it *is* transformed.[8] Once Texaco is acknowledged '*for* the Other', as a part of the town, its position on the outskirts ceases to be a sign of exclusion or even of belligerent opposition and becomes rather a simple marker of difference. Marie-Sophie and her Quartier will exist on their own terms: culturally specific, different from — but equal to — the metropolitan Centre. It is this affirmation of equal authority to exist not only '*for* the Other' but *in and for*

[8] Chamoiseau insists that Martinican society is not a harmonious 'métissage' of its racial and cultural components: 'La société est restée, anthropologiquement parlant, très diffractée entre les békés, les nègres, les coulis; tous ont des trajectoires historiques différentes, des temps différents, des perceptions différentes' [Anthropologically speaking, [Martinican] society has remained very fragmented between Whites, Blacks, 'Coolis'; they all have different histories, different senses of time, different perceptions]. See Ottmar Ette and Ralph Ludwig, 'En guise d'introduction: points de vue sur l'évolution de la littérature antillaise. Entretien avec les écrivains martiniquais Patrick Chamoiseau et Raphaël Confiant', *Lendemains*, 67 (1992), 6–16 (pp. 14–15).

oneself that is intended by the Marqueur when he declares at the end of the book:

> Je voulais qu'il soit chanté quelque part, dans l'écoute des générations à venir, que nous nous étions battus avec l'En-ville, non pour le conquérir (lui qui en fait nous gobait), mais pour nous conquérir nous-mêmes dans l'inédit créole qu'il nous fallait nommer — en nous-mêmes et pour nous-mêmes — jusqu'à notre pleine autorité. (*T* 497–8)
>
> I wanted a song to sound in the hearing of generations to come, that we had fought with the Town, not to conquer it (in fact it was swallowing us up), but to conquer ourselves in respect of all our new, our unexpressed Créolité that we had to name — in ourselves and for ourselves — until we fully became masters of it.

Chamoiseau, then, by making use of a relatively conventional postcolonial dialectic of sharp differentiation between subordinated subject and dominant Metropolitan authority, nevertheless departs from the expectations suggested by the Memmi/Fanon framework by presenting a strong subject, actively resisting definition by the dominant Other and finding new solutions to the problem of the subordinated self, on the one hand through creativity, and on the other through affirmations of difference leading to equality of treatment.

From this initial analysis, it is further possible to deduce the profound relativity of Chamoiseau's subject, which seems bound, whatever its innate characteristics, to emerge fully only in response to external factors.

The Subject as Fixed and Flexible

It is true that Chamoiseau achieves this depiction of the subject, at the primary level we have so far addressed, largely by insisting on the specificities of both Créolité and the postcolonial situation: but *Texaco* does not restrict itself to comment upon the Creole condition alone. This can be seen in various aspects of the text's thematics where the personal and private interact with the collective and public: one of the most fruitful to examine is the theme of history, since this will allow us to move progressively from the specifically Creole to the more general subject.

To begin with the specific expression of Créolité, it is once again in large part through the metonymical association of character and space that the novel investigates the place of history in the location and expression of the subject, for one legacy of their ancestors'

dispossession is, for the Creoles, an acute sense of the symbolism of place. Thus, on the plantations, the slaves' miserable 'bitation' and the planter's 'Grand-case'[9] are synonymous with slavery for Blacks, power and riches for Whites. The 'mornes', or hills, on the other hand, are associated with freedom and the possibility of a new start: it is here that, for the first time, Marie-Sophie's father Esternome learns to say 'Je. Je. Je', a refrain he repeats when recounting his exploits years later (*T* 174–6). The episode of the 'Noutéka des mornes' (*T* 161–73) is Esternome's first real affirmation of self, and coincides with his establishment in a location which is not only untainted by the presence of the planters, but which has a long association with the (illicit) liberty of the 'marrons' who ran away from the 'bitations' to live there before the abolition of slavery. This, for the first time, is Esternome's *own* space, for him to shape according to his culture (*T* 166–7). It is in this edenic space of new beginnings where 'le monde était à faire' [the world was yet to be made] (*T* 173), that the historical and mythical Origins of the Quartier créole are laid down. Esternome and Marie-Sophie project onto it the ideal, harmonious relationship between human being and landscape:[10]

> Quartier créole obéit à sa terre, mais aussi à ses herbes dont il retire la paille. Et aussi à ses bois dont il enlève ses cases. Et aussi aux couleurs de sa terre d'où il tire sa maçonne. Quartier créole est comme fleur de l'endroit.
>
> Quartier créole, c'est des gens qui s'entendent. [...] C'est *l'entraide* qui mène. (*T* 172)

> The Creole district obeys the land, the grasses too, from which it takes its straw. And its woods, from which it takes its cabins. Also the colours of its soil where it gets its bricks. The Creole district is like a flower of the place.
>
> The Creole district is people getting along [...] *helping each other* first of all.

In this vision, a culturally specific definition of inhabited space, as well as an Original ideal and a model for the future are established.

As we have seen, the same is to be true of Texaco for, says Marie-Sophie, 'Je sentais aussi (comme mon Esternome me l'avait fait sentir) qu'il fallait face à l'En-ville organiser un vrai Quartier des mornes' [I also felt (as Esternome had shown) that against the Town

[9] Slaves' quarters and a colonial planter's house, respectively.

[10] The Creole formula 'Noutéka' which returns like a refrain throughout this passage carries the marker of the imperfect tense and is approximately equivalent to 'We used to...'. This reinforces the sense of reference to a distant, quasi-mythical set of Original traditions.

we had to organize a district just like the 'mornes'] (*T* 350). The Quartier créole is to flow organically both from the Creole identity and from the historical legacy created in the 'Noutéka des mornes'. For the Urbaniste, the Quartier is at first less the means of his expressing his identity than, by making contact with his history, that of finding it again and (literally and metaphorically) developing it:

> Au centre [de la ville], une logique urbaine occidentale, alignée, ordonnée, forte comme la langue française. De l'autre [côté], le foisonnement ouvert de la langue créole dans la logique de Texaco. [...] La ville créole restitue à l'urbaniste qui voudrait l'oublier les souches d'une identité neuve: multilingue, multiraciale, multi-historique, ouverte, sensible à la diversité du monde. (*T* 282)
>
> At the centre [of the town], a Western logic of town-planning, straight-lined, orderly, powerful as the French language. On the other [side], the teeming openness of the Creole language, in the logic of Texaco. [...] The Creole town brings the town planner who wants to forget them back to the roots of a new identity: multi-lingual, multi-racial, multi-historied, open, responsive to the diversity of the world.

It is fitting that the shacks of Texaco should be made out of whatever materials come to hand, ingeniously adapted by the inhabitants, for they thus express the hybridity, flexibility and adaptability of the Creole subjects who are their owners and creators. As the Urbaniste notes:

> Au centre [de la ville], on se perd dans le moderne du monde; ici [à Texaco], on ramène de très vieilles racines, non profondes et rigides, mais diffuses, profuses, épandues sur le temps. (*T* 218)
>
> Downtown, you get lost in the modernity of the world; here [in Texaco], you get back to very old roots, not deep and stiff, but ramified, abundant, spreading out across time.

According to this view, an important part of the contrast between the Centre and the Creole district is the bland homogeneity of the former, as distinct from the dynamic, 'diffuse and spreading' roots of Créolité. As Homi Bhabha has put it:

> The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation.[11]

[11] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 2.

The expression of culture, even in traditional practices, may be constantly adjusted according to evolving circumstances. We shall find that the same can be said about history, which for Marie-Sophie and the Urbaniste also plays an essential role in the construction and location of self.

Like other Antillean variations on the theme of the loss and rediscovery of a history accounting for contemporary identity,[12] *Texaco* displays the 'impulse to find "*a*" history and, therefore, the means to overcome the alienation and uprootedness that comes with the loss of the collective memory we know as history'.[13] In fact Chamoiseau sets up *Texaco* as a sort of alternative, Creole-orientated history book: the text openly chronicles a large part of Martinican history, from slavery and its abolition to the present day via both major and minor historical events; and it includes at the start a chronology of historical events arranged according to sequential 'Ages' of Creole development (*T* 13–15).

Unlike conventional histories, however, Marie-Sophie's is recounted in such a manner as to mingle the personal and the public, the subjective and the objective. Linking her own destiny to that of her whole people in a way that illustrates her representative quality in the text, Marie-Sophie points out near the start of her tale: 'Pour comprendre Texaco et l'élan de nos pères vers l'En-ville, il nous faudra remonter loin dans la lignée de ma propre famille car mon intelligence de la mémoire collective n'est que ma propre mémoire' [To understand Texaco and the impulse of our fathers towards Downtown, we'll have to go right back into my own family tree because my understanding of the collective memory is only my own memory] (*T* 48).

Similarly, at a personal, individual level, Marie-Sophie is convinced of the power of history. Evoking her father's first encounter with a finely constructed roof (he will later become a roof-builder himself), she remarks: 'Cette vue de la charpente détermina sans doute les tracées de sa vie, de son destin et finalement du mien' [This view of the roof frame probably determined the outlines of his life, of his destiny, and in the end of mine too]. But she adds: 'Mais rien de

[12] See E. Sellin, 'Intertextual Dynamics of Identity Retrieval and Creation in Francophone Literature', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, I, 1 (1998), 3–10.

[13] Ibid., p. 5.

l'avenir n'allant à découvert il n'en sut la musique qu'une fois violon dans sac' [But nothing of the future being obvious, he only came to know the music once he'd got himself a violin] (*T* 60–61). Despite the humorous turn of phrase, there is a very serious point here, for memory — retrospective understanding, and the ability to see the 'traces' left by the past — is seen as playing a crucial role in identity. Chamoiseau has most recently spoken about the importance of such 'traces', a privileged term in his vocabulary, in the essay *Ecrire en pays dominé*. In this text he relates his efforts to discover more about his own identity by a process of imagining his personal links to each group of early Antillean inhabitants, describing his encounter with the 'traces-mémoires' imprinted by each group in modern Creole history and culture — and therefore in himself:

> La *Trace* est marque concrète: tambour, arbre, bateau, panier, un quartier, une chanson, un sentier qui s'en va... Les *mémoires* irradient dans la Trace, elles *l'habitent* d'une présence-sans-matière offerte à l'émotion. Leurs associations, *Traces-mémoires*, ne font pas monuments, ni ne cristallisent une mémoire unique: elles sont jeu des mémoires qui se sont emmêlées. [...] Leurs significations demeurent évolutives, non figées-univoques comme celles du monument.[14]

> The Trace is the concrete mark: drum, tree, boat, basket, district, song, path running away... Memories radiate out from the Trace, they dwell in it with an immaterial presence open to affectivity. Their associations, Trace-Memories, are not monuments, and do not crystallize into a single memory; they are the play of different interwoven memories. [...] Their meanings remain in evolution, not fixed and unequivocal like those of a monument.

Here once again, echoing Bhabha's view (above), is the notion that roots, traces, even history itself, are not fixed but may have flexible significance which constantly alters as the cluster of signifiers of which it is part reforms and evolves in changing circumstances. Yet it is clear that the presence of 'traces-mémoires' is not only enriching but *formative* in terms of the dynamic sense of identity.

This is confirmed once again in the Quartier of Texaco, where we encounter some of the most explicit indications of the need for an identity to take account of its past. The Urbaniste, for example, notes that the Quartier will bear the physical look and identity of its people's experiences: 'Le Quartier Texaco naît de la violence. Alors

[14] Patrick Chamoiseau, *Ecrire en pays dominé*, p. 120. See also Chamoiseau and Confiant, *Lettres Créoles*, op. cit.; and Chamoiseau, *Guyane: Traces-mémoires du bagne* (Paris: Caisse Nationale des monuments historiques et des sites, 1994).

pourquoi s'étonner de ses cicatrices et de sa face de guerre?' [The Texaco district is born out of violence. So why be surprised at its scars, its war-marked face?] (*T* 192). The scars which denote Texaco's history in its appearance, the Urbaniste later implies, are part of the very function of Texaco, which is to act as a kind of monument (of the flexible, intangible type privileged by Chamoiseau in *Ecrire en pays dominé*) to all that Créolité has borne in order for the Quartier to be established:

> La ville créole qui possède si peu de monuments, devient monument par le soin porté à ses lieux de mémoire. Le monument, là comme dans toute l'Amérique, ne s'érige pas monumental: il irradie. (*T* 430)
>
> The Creole town which possesses so few monuments, becomes a monument through the care taken over its sites of memory. The monument, there as throughout America, is not erected monumentally: it irradiates.

Once again, here, the specifically Creole experience is used to make a general point: the history and location of identity and the identity itself are inseparable. Each expresses the others, and all bear the composite signs of their provenance and past, their cultural characteristics, and their flexibility.

The last revelation of Marie-Sophie's story consecrates this intimate connection between history and identity, expressed through location, when, as we know, she finally admits that her secret 'nom de guerre' is in fact 'Texaco'. Thus the name which was already attached to the place is first appropriated by Marie-Sophie and then passed back to the location through her: once again, as with the construction of Texaco's huts, the material to hand, taken over and adapted for use by the protagonist, resurfaces anew, as a symbolic expression of the subject. In the course of this metaphorical detour via Marie-Sophie's purposes, however, the word 'Texaco' has been transformed, for it now 'irradiates' an extra layer of meaning forged out of the personal and collective history associated with it.

To summarize, then, the most obvious set of characteristics associated with Chamoiseau's subject as revealed through the metonymic relationship between space and subject goes beyond close ties with a specific culture or location, important though these may be. The strongly rooted Creole particularities of *Texaco* suggest a general pattern in which the subject contains a crucial element of adaptability and flexibility as well as a dynamic reciprocal relationship with external factors such as history and the environment.

The Dynamic Subject and the 'Identité Mosaïque'

This perspective may be developed further. As we have seen, since Marie-Sophie's personal history is bound up with that of a whole people, she becomes a representative figure of Creole history in general. Conversely, however, the text shows that the sweep of history does not consist only of abstract — or even symbolic — grand narratives: it is composed of the millions of personal histories of real people like Esternome, Ninon and the rest, each of them equally valid and immediate for the subject involved. Thus Marie-Sophie's story is exemplary not only because it recalls so many others through its *similarities* with them, but because its individuality and subjectivity — its *differences* — recall its provisional nature, inviting us to speculate how many other potential histories there are. Marie-Sophie herself deliberately calls attention to this: 'Toi tu dis l'Histoire, moi je dis *les histoires*. Celle que tu crois tige-maîtresse de notre manioc n'est qu'une tige parmi charge d'autres' [You say History, I say *histories*. What you think is the main stem of our cassava root is only one stem among many others] (*T* 117).

Nor is this history which is both subjective and collective seen as the pure product of rational thought. Both the imagination and the pfeelings of the subject who participates in and recounts it come visibly into play: Esternome does not participate in the 'Noutéka des mornes', for example, because he has any sense of a people's history in the making but, quite simply, because he is in love. Similarly, in retelling his adventures afterwards, he omits certain details, lies about others, and, as his faculties begin to fail, relies on imagination or superstition for others still. Indeed, what he provides in the end is not reliable, objective history but unreliable and yet powerfully gripping legend, in which yet again the raw materials of circumstances are seen to have been appropriated and processed by the individual subject before being passed on, modified and enriched by the contact, in such a way that 'Légende, c'est mémoire plus grande que mémoire' [Legend is memory that's bigger than memory] (*T* 226). In this way, each member of the community has the opportunity to create and sustain the collective identity as each separate subject reshapes the stories of the past according to its own subjective present, for, as Marie-Sophie declares: 'Il faut parler, raconter, raconter les histoires et vivre les légendes' [We have to speak, recount, tell the stories and live the legends] (*T* 228).

This process of history-making (or legend-making) is explicitly exemplified both in Marie-Sophie's *récit*, for example by the inclusion at its start of three separate versions of Christ's 'arrival' as well as her own (*T* 9–34); and in the Marqueur's *récit* by his admission of the difficulties of editing Marie-Sophie's text, which thus becomes progressively a pseudo-*récit*, one which has been cut, organized and tidied up by the Marqueur (*T* 268n, for example). Indeed, writing, with its appearance of definitive objectivity, is seen in the text as particularly ill-suited to the retelling of legend and the continuous, dynamic creation of the subject. At the same time, however, because of its central concern for the Marqueur, it is in the discussion of writing that the text is perhaps at its most revealing. Here Marie-Sophie asks the Marqueur:

> Oiseau Cham, existe-t-il une écriture informée de la parole, et des silences, et qui reste vivante, qui bouge en cercle et circule tout le temps, irriguant sans cesse de vie ce qui a été écrit avant, et qui réinvente le cercle à chaque fois comme le font les spirales qui sont à tout moment dans le futur et dans l'avant, l'une modifiant l'autre, sans cesse, sans perdre une unité difficile à nommer? (*T* 413)
>
> Bird of Cham, is there a form of writing shaped by speech and by silence, which remains alive, moving round in a circle, circulating all the time, endlessly irrigating with life what's been written in the past, each time reinventing the circle like spirals that are at any given moment in both the future and the past, each modifying the other, ceaselessly, without losing the unity it's so hard to put a name to?

This is clearly far more than the simple plea to keep alive the Creole art of *oralité* that many critics have seen in Chamoiseau's work.[15] In view of the preceding analysis, it seems fair to say that this extract expresses nothing less than the writer's constant and anxious preoccupation with the fitting of 'forme' to 'fond'. That 'fond', the

[15] See for instance Richard Burton, 'Patterns of Opposition in the Fiction of Patrick Chamoiseau', *Callaloo*, 16, 2 (1993), 466–81; Kathleen Gyssels, 'Du titre au roman: *Texaco* de Patrick Chamoiseau', *ROMAN 20-50: Revue d'étude du roman du XX^e siècle*, 20 (1995), 121–32; Marie-José Jolivet, 'Les Cahiers de Marie-Sophie Laborieux existent-ils? ou du rapport de la créolité à l'oralité et à l'écriture', *Cahiers des Sciences Humaines*, 29 (1993), 795–804; Serge Dominique Ménager, 'Topographie, texte et palimpseste: *Texaco* de Patrick Chamoiseau', *The French Review*, 68, 1 (1994), 61–8; and Christiane Ndiaye, 'De la pratique des détours chez Sembène, Chamoiseau et Ben Jelloun', *Tangence*, 49 (1995), 63–77. For a reading which, in contrast, sets Chamoiseau's work in a wider context, see Maeve McCusker, 'Telling Stories/Creating History: Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco*', *The ASCALF Yearbook 3*, (1998), 23–33.

quotation implies, is in fact the dynamic subject in all its spiralling, ever-shifting complexity.

Chamoiseau has said himself that what is 'totally new' in his and the Creolists' idea of identity is the notion of 'l'identité mosaïque', by which they mean that, while each culture and each individual is separate, each is also made up to some extent of the other cultures shaping a given society. Thus, for example, as Martinicans, 'nous sommes *à la fois* nègres, békés, coulis etc. Parce que la proximité de ces différentes densités culturelles et leurs interactions ont fait que, pour exister, chaque communauté a emprunté à l'autre' [we are *at one and the same time* Blacks, Whites, 'Coolis' etc. Because the proximity of these different cultural densities and their interactions have meant that, in order to exist, each community has borrowed from the others]. The job of Creole literature, Chamoiseau concludes, is 'de définir de manière intuitive et artistique comment fonctionne une identité mosaïque' [to define intuitively and aesthetically how a mosaic identity functions].[16]

The latter part of this project seems without doubt to be a major focus of *Texaco*: as we have seen, the emphasis of this text's investigation of the subject is firmly upon its functioning, its dynamism. The former assertion, however, remains somewhat open to question, for the culture displayed and affirmed in this novel is almost uniquely that of the descendants of the 'nèg-de-terre'; although Creole culture is presented as flexible and adaptable, we certainly do not see it or the subject in prominent interaction exclusively with a mosaic of other *cultural* identities. In *Texaco*, Chamoiseau seems to see the construction of the subject not solely in cultural terms, but in terms of its relations with *any* external or internal phenomenon: here, his 'mosaïque' is composed not only of racial or cultural pieces, but of history, place, other human beings, the natural environment, a role or vocation, social structures, individual character traits, and so on, all or any of which may be in interaction.

There is another reason to suggest that identity is not only cultural for Chamoiseau. We have noted already that the evocation of the subject and its interactions does not for Chamoiseau take place against a neutral background. Marie-Sophie's quest and Chamoiseau's writing are primarily political projects in that they are to do with the

[16] Ette and Ludwig, p. 15.

reassessment and reconfiguration of power relations between (Metropolitan) authority and an individual but representative, subordinated (Creole) subject. Both Marie-Sophie's success and Chamoiseau's own literary productions seem clearly to suggest that while cultural difference is often the *locus* of the struggle between subject and authority, the subject has a political vocation to assert itself which is just as important as the culture with which it identifies. As we have seen, the subject's relations with alterity are programmed by a need to be recognized on a basis of equality which, for the Creole subject, is still absent and therefore to be claimed all the more insistently. Again, however, it is not necessary to tie this conclusion uniquely to the Creole context, as Chamoiseau himself makes clear in looking to future uses of 'la Créolité':

> De plus en plus, les enfants qui naissent de par le monde ne relèvent pas d'une nation, d'une culture, d'une langue, d'une histoire uniques, mais sont immédiatement confrontés à plusieurs terres, plusieurs cultures, plusieurs races, plusieurs langues. Si l'on n'y prend pas garde, c'est-à-dire si l'on perpétue cette perception quasi-monolithique de l'humanité, de la culture, de l'universel, on ira vers des drames, parce qu'on ne sera pas en mesure de définir certains enfants se trouvant en état de créolité [...]. De plus en plus, un des objets de la littérature sera justement d'explorer cette nouvelle donne anthropologique. C'est ce que nous avons commencé à faire. [17]

> More and more, children born all over the world do not belong to a single nation, culture, language, history but are immediately confronted with several lands, cultures, races, languages. If we are not careful, that is, if the near-monolithic conception of humanity, of culture, of the universal, is perpetuated, there will be trouble, because some children in a state of Creolity will be undefinable [...]. Increasingly, one of the aims of literature will be to explore this anthropological new deal. That is what we have begun to do.

It can be seen here what an ambitious project 'la Créolité' is. Chamoiseau is claiming that *all* subjects are to some extent 'Creole', hybrid or 'mosaic'. His ideal subject as it emerges from *Texaco*, therefore, becomes a paradigm not only of the localized, colonized Creole, but of the subject in general. And yet such a general vision of the subject in no way represents a new version of that colonialist universalism which has for decades denied the Otherness of colonized peoples with such damaging effects for their sense of self. Rather, as he says: 'De l'universalité souvent aplatissante, nous tendons [dans la

[17] Ibid., p. 15.

Créolité] vers un imaginaire où l'Unité humaine s'exprime dans la diversité. Et cette dynamique de l'Unité qui se fait en Divers s'appelle la Diversalité'[18] [We tend away from a frequently levelling universalism and towards an imaginary in which human Unity expresses itself in Diversity. And this dynamic of Unity in Diversity we call Diversality]. As we might infer from the presentation of history in *Texaco*, Chamoiseau sees different subjects' very diversity as the principal uniting factor between them.

Conclusion

This emphasis on 'Diversalité' as the keynote of Chamoiseau's vision will allow us to conclude by pointing to perhaps the most striking qualities of his ideal subject, which will in turn differentiate him from certain of his metropolitan contemporaries.

Firstly, it is clear that while the postcolonial situation shapes his whole concept of the environment to be negotiated by the individual or collective identity, Chamoiseau's imperatively political vision can be applied to a variety of contexts, for, wherever two subjects — or indeed constitutive factors of the same subject — meet, the potential exists for them to present themselves in hierarchical relation to one another. For Chamoiseau, as we have seen, the individual subject must refuse to submit to the establishment of hierarchical opposites and, like the Urbaniste of Texaco, 's'érige[r] en artiste', asserting itself by evolving in creative interaction with the various elements of subjectivity at any given time. The task of the subject, then, is to abolish static, oppositional hierarchies, both internal and external to the self; and to undermine examples of monological thinking by seeking diversity. This has profound political implications for entrenched or hierarchical structures everywhere, whether or not they arise out of postcolonial contexts.

Secondly, and related to this, Chamoiseau's vision is in tune with those who see the self as a fundamentally ethical phenomenon. Insisting on the need to apprehend the subject 'in moral space', Charles Taylor states that:

[18] Chamoiseau, *Ecrire en pays dominé*, p. 297.

> My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose.[19]

Chamoiseau's insistence on *diversalité* suggests, as a corollary of his political vision, that the ideal subject must also possess a 'frame or horizon' which involves a politicized tolerance, actively open to the diversity of Others and respecting it on equal terms. As Marie-Sophie says: 'il faut savoir qu[e] [...] les temps ne sont pas les mêmes pour tous' [one must understand that [...] seasons run differently for different people] (*T* 100).

It is this explicitly politico-ethical aspect of his work, closely mirrored by his aesthetic programme, that perhaps most differentiates Patrick Chamoiseau from many other contemporary authors. After all, a large number of other francophone authors are also producing profound investigations of the postcolonial subject.[20] But although these writers of course address political questions, few have developed such a widely appealing and accessible expression of a coherent ethics and poetics as Chamoiseau.[21] In addition, over the last thirty years or so, Metropolitan authors like Patrick Modiano and J. M. G. Le Clézio, or, more recently, Jean Echenoz or the group operating under the label 'la nouvelle fiction',[22] have produced unreliable narratives which emphasize the subjectivity of narrators just as much as *Texaco*'s do. Such writers have generally been more obviously preoccupied by the theoretical, literary or metaphysical problematics of the self. By comparison with many of them, the less introspective terms of Chamoiseau's project appear both more directly pertinent to geopolitical realities, and more humane.

His vision of the subject undoubtedly bears the 'memory-traces' of

[19] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 27.

[20] For further details see Belinda Jack, *Francophone Literatures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[21] Such coherence is no doubt a feature of Martinican literature, which has a long tradition of theorizing the Black subject, going back to Césaire. More recently, Glissant is an important forerunner of Chamoiseau's poetics and politics: see Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), and *Poétique de la relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991).

[22] See Julian Károlyi, *Literary Renewal and the Reader: The Multiple Pleasures of La Nouvelle Fiction*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of St Andrews, Scotland, December 1997; and Jean-Luc Moreau, *La Nouvelle fiction* (Paris: Criterion, 1992).

writers like Memmi and Fanon, without whom it could not have been conceived. But, though rooted in the specificity of a postcolonial situation, it is, ultimately, universally — or, rather, diversely — applicable.

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THE EXCEPTIONAL SUBJECT OF MICHEL FOUCAULT

Il faudrait que je suppose que dans mon discours
il n'y va pas de ma survie?[1]
(Michel Foucault)

What's the latest on *the subject*? One asks the question as one might inquire after a character on a soap opera that one watches only intermittently. If, when we last saw our hero, he appeared definitively dead and buried, in recent episodes he has not only been resuscitated, but he seems to have a hand in every subplot. Indeed, there have been so many disappearances and reappearances in recent years that one might be forgiven for not being up to date on the subject's whereabouts or current state of animation.

The 'death of the subject', if there was one, was never quite of natural causes. Whether a murder or a mercy killing, its alleged perpetrators are all well known to the authorities: Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, Lyotard, and their accomplices. But can we be so sure that this death was not just an elaborate hoax? And, even if it wasn't a hoax, can we be sure about who or what exactly died? In so far as 'the subject' has always implied a great many different things to a great many different theorists, its 'death' too means different things. In short, one is never quite sure *which* subject is being referred to, regardless of whether those doing the referring are for or against.

What seems clear is that in recent times something like a subject has come back into the philosophical limelight, in France and elsewhere. Indeed, there has been a real (and almost literal!) 'renaissance'. The work of Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut was at the forefront of this return in philosophy.[2] Along with the work of Louis Dumont and Gilles

[1] Michel Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 274.

[2] See Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *La Pensée 68* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), and *68–86:*

Lipovetsky in the domains of anthropology and sociology respectively,[3] it has given rise to a resurgence of interest in something that may or may not differ from the subject, namely *the individual*.[4] But even here there is uncertainty: it is not clear *why* the subject/individual is back in vogue or *which* subject has come back from the dead. The answer to this depends on whether the reasons for its renaissance are theoretical, practical, or sociological/historical.

For Ferry and Renaut, the reasons are above all those of practical philosophy. If we need a subject, it is because without one, in their view, certain other desiderata such as human rights and responsibilities become inconceivable. They claim that there must be something like a subject — a self-identical consciousness and will in full and sovereign possession of its own beliefs and desires, and at the origin of its actions — mostly because, without such a foundation, the rights (including *les droits de l'homme*) and responsibilities of the members of a republic become incomprehensible and unjustifiable. If my actions cannot be attributed to me, how can I be held responsible for them? Indeed, in such a case, the very idea of human endeavour of any kind loses most of its meaning. In this type of argument, the truth of the notion of the 'subject' is a function (or consequence) of its utility for us, even where such utility is widely accepted. The subject could still prove to be an illusion, albeit a useful and even necessary one. Much scarcer, at least in France, are those who defend the subject on theoretical grounds. That is, it is difficult to find many in France prepared to argue for the *truth* of a pure Cartesian subject — a *subjectum*, or solid, underlying foundation to our representations and acts — regardless of the practical consequences. Nobody seems prepared to claim, for example, that the unconscious is an illusion. Most of the subject's defenders content themselves with pointing out certain

Itinéraires de l'individu (Paris: Gallimard, 1987); Luc Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus* (Paris: Grasset, 1988); Alain Renaut, *L'Ere de l'individu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989).

[3] Louis Dumont, *Essais sur l'individualisme* (Paris: Seuil 1983); Gilles Lipovetsky, *L'Ere du vide* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983) and *L'Empire de l'éphémère* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

[4] Some of the other theorists to have taken part in these debates include Marcel Gauchet, Alain Ehrenberg, Pierre Ronsanvallon, Alain Finkielkraut, Dominique Schnapper, Cornelius Castoriadis, Tzvetan Todorov, Olivier Mongin and Vincent Descombes. A useful and brief review of some of the recent developments can be found in Alain Renaut, *L'Individu: Réflexions sur la philosophie du sujet* (Paris: Hatier, 1995).

conceptual difficulties that the critique of the subject entails.

This split between the theoretical and the practical, however, mirrors an implicit split in the various critiques of the subject. On the one hand, there are those who claim that subjectivity is a lie or reified construct which should therefore be abandoned, whatever the practical consequences. Here one thinks of Nietzsche but also perhaps of Freud. On the other hand are those whose disqualification of subjectivity is rooted in what they take to be its practical consequences, notably the domination of instrumental reason and the subjection of all beings to the will of man. Here the later Heidegger comes to mind, but also many Marxist critics, including the Frankfurt School. Most of the major French critics of the subject — Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard — seem to straddle the line (as, one might argue, does Heidegger), seeking to win on all counts. In their work, the subject is often presented as both theoretically false and practically dangerous.

Such critiques make a normative claim, even where the norm is simply that of truth: namely, that we *should* abandon the subject for being either false or dangerous or both. This normative claim is subject to refutation in practical terms, as Ferry and Renaut have demonstrated throughout their recent work, or in theoretical terms. Practical refutations will attempt to show that the subject, far from being a pernicious construct, is a desirable one; theoretical refutations, that it is necessary or true that man is a subject and that the subject is precisely *not* a construct. Yet in the 1960s and 70s, French structuralist and poststructuralist thinkers also made a third sort of critical claim about the subject, itself vulnerable to a third sort of refutation. Not only did they claim it was a construct, function, or illusion, pernicious in its practical consequences, they also claimed that it was a recent *invention*, localizable in time and space even where the time is 'ever since Plato' and the space encompasses 'the West'. This historical and sociological claim that we live in the era of the subject was accompanied, in the work of the best-known critics of the subject, Derrida and Foucault, by portentous predictions that the era in question was coming to an end. Who can forget the striking passage at the end of *Les Mots et les choses*, where Foucault predicted that man would be erased like a face drawn in the sand by the incoming tide?[5]

[5] Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 398.

What Foucault refers to as 'l'homme' is nothing other than an avatar of 'the subject' under consideration. Passages such as this make claims that are neither simply theoretical ones about the falsity of the subject nor practical ones about its uselessness or undesirability. They are historical predictions based on the theoretical and normative claims that, because the subject is false and harmful, its days are numbered and it will be abandoned as a model. Foucault himself refers to this claim as 'un diagnostic du présent': a diagnosis which presumably detects the latent symptoms of the subject's death beneath what only seems to us to be our subjectivity.[6] Though Foucault's thought underwent a great many changes over the years, this interest in uncovering the ontological presuppositions undergirding the present remains constant throughout his career. Foucault in his early work saw the theoretical and practical status of the subject (and the various positions thereon) as rooted in the historical, itself conceived as something other, something deeper, than the mere human history that men — subjects — presumably make.

If, later in Foucault's career, Nietzsche became the more decisive influence, his early work, particularly *Les Mots et les choses*, seems more heavily influenced by Heidegger. In the case of Heidegger, the hypothesis of a history of Being holds that the fundamental conditions of human thought and action are at one and the same time transcendental, in that they determine all that is necessary or possible to think, say, or do in a given epoch, and variable, with a history of their own underlying the history of humankind. The contact between these two histories is a one-way street: though the history of Being has a determining influence on human history, human history has none on the history of Being. In the end, human history is rendered ultimately mysterious precisely because it is not made by humans.

Foucault's approach to history in his early work is remarkably similar to Heidegger's. Foucault takes as his object of study what he calls the *epistemès*, or 'champs épistémologiques', which are similar to Heidegger's dispensations of Being in that the *epistemè* of a given epoch underlies and structures all that it is possible to think or say in that epoch. There is an *epistemè* of the modern epoch that differs from that of the 'classical' age. Unlike Heidegger, Foucault, it is true,

[6] Foucault, 'Foucault répond à Sartre' (1968), in *Dits et écrits 1954-1988*, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), I, pp. 662–8 (p. 665). Henceforth abbreviated to *DE*.

resists to a certain extent the temptation to turn the hypothetical structure that constrains our thinking into a ground, preferring to see it as an order or system occupying a 'middle realm': a realm at once prior to the already-codified words, conceptions, and gestures that are amenable to empirical and historical study, and more solid and true than the 'philosophical foundation' postulated by theoretical reason.[7] The 'archaeological' inquiry into this middle realm that Foucault pursues is meant to be a 'history' of the 'conditions of possibility' of our 'knowledge'. The *epistemè* is thus, as he puts it, an 'historical *a priori*'.[8] This, however, does not make Foucault a straightforward historicist, although he will arguably later become one, for one of the things conditioned by the history of the *epistemès* is human history itself.

The *epistemè* thus plays much the same role for Foucault as Being does for Heidegger in that the *epistemè* (or its conceptual replacement in the later Foucault: the *dispositif* of power relations) governs all that it is possible to think and do in an epoch. But Foucault pushes this determinism even further than did Heidegger, for the *epistemè* determines not just what is necessary and possible, conceivable and inconceivable. In some sense, it determines *everything*:

> A toutes les époques, la façon dont les gens réfléchissent, écrivent, jugent, parlent (jusque dans la rue, les conversations et les écrits les plus quotidiens) et même la façon dont les gens éprouvent les choses, dont leur sensibilité réagit, toute leur conduite est commandée par une structure théorique, un *système*, qui change avec les âges et les sociétés.[9]
>
> In every epoch, the way in which people think, write, judge, speak (even in their most everyday conversations and writings) and even the way in which people experience things, the way in which their sensibility reacts, the entirety of their conduct is commanded by a theoretical structure, a *system*, which varies with the era and the society.

If all of our acts are not only conditioned but 'commanded' by the 'system', then human agency and, *a fortiori*, human freedom are illusions. Finally, as for Heidegger's Being, the *epistemè* is nowhere in evidence as such and is thus ultimately mysterious, as are the reasons for its mutations. Or as Foucault put it, describing in terms reminiscent

[7] Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses*, pp. 12, 13.

[8] Ibid., p. 13.

[9] Foucault, 'Entretien avec Madeleine Chapsal' (1966), in *DE* I, pp. 513–18 (p. 515). All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

of the Heideggerian *Ereignis* the change of *epistemè* that he claims took place at the end of the eighteenth century:

> Pour une archéologie du savoir, cette ouverture profonde dans la nappe des continuités, si elle doit être analysée, et minutieusement, ne peut être 'expliquée' ni même recueillie en une parole unique. Elle est un événement radical qui se répartit sur toute la surface visible du savoir et dont on peut suivre pas à pas les signes, les secousses, les effets.[10]
>
> For an archaeology of knowledge, this profound opening in the tissue of continuities, if it is to be minutely analysed, cannot be 'explained by' nor even brought together in a single utterance. It is a radical event distributed over the entire visible surface of knowledge, the signs — the shocks and effects — of which can be followed step by step.

Foucault's prediction at the end of *Les Mots et les choses* is that a similar radical shift in *epistemès* is on the verge of happening, the signs of which, presumably, can also be 'followed step by step'. Foucault goes on, in an interview, to clarify his prediction: 'Dans le grondement qui nous ébranle aujourd'hui, il faut peut-être reconnaître la naissance d'un monde où l'on saura que le sujet n'est pas un, mais scindé, non pas souverain, mais dépendant, non pas origine absolue, mais fonction sans cesse modifiable' [We should perhaps see the rumbling by which we are today being shaken as the birth of a world in which it will be recognized that the subject is not one, but divided, not sovereign, but dependent, not an absolute origin, but an endlessly modifiable function].[11] A rupture in *epistemès* entails a changed conception of the subject. Foucault's brand of deep historicism obviously precludes the possibility that such a change in *epistemès* be caused by any event in (mere) human history. He therefore cannot mean what he says when in 1967 he describes structuralism as the 'cause' of this sea-change,[12] for the entire thrust of his thought in this period is that changes in *epistemès* are necessarily inexplicable in terms of the sort of causality that is itself one of their effects. Rather, in some sense, the change in question, the

[10] Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses*, p. 229.

[11] Foucault, 'La Naissance d'un monde,' in *DE* I, pp. 786–9 (p. 789).

[12] 'Il me semble que cette pensée est en train de se défaire, de se désagréger sous nos yeux. Cela est dû pour une grande part au développement structuraliste' [It seems to me that this thought is in the process of coming undone, of distintegrating before our very eyes. This is due in large part to the structuralist development]. See Foucault, 'Qui êtes-vous, professeur Foucault?' (1967), in *DE* I, pp. 601–20 (p. 608).

disintegration of the humanist structure of nineteenth-century thought, must be the *cause* of structuralism. From such a perspective, 'discoveries' in the human sciences are no more than symptoms of this deeper change in the *epistemè*. This is why Foucault once defined his own work as the attempt to 'retrouver dans l'histoire de la science, des connaissances et du savoir humain quelque chose qui en serait comme l'inconscient' [to find in the history of science and of human knowledge something like its unconscious].[13]

The signs of this change in *epistemè* in Foucault's view are that, the more the human sciences have taken man as their object of study, the more they have come to see man as nothing more than the product of forces and structures that transcend him. Foucault's innovation relative to the structuralists is to claim such determination even for those aspects of man that seemed irreducibly tied to human intention: for example the realms of discourse (as opposed to language), thought, and history. But, as Foucault points out, this revolution in the conception of man as object of study cannot but have effects on the conception of man as the subject of this very knowledge. As Foucault put it in 1967: 'l'homme cesse [...] d'être à soi-même son propre sujet' [man ceases [...] to be his own subject] as a result of the reflexivity of this perspective.[14] In other words, it must also be the case that the subject of this very knowledge regarding the dissolution of man as centre and ground of his own acts cannot logically be exempt from the claim embodying such knowledge. Thus the 'knowledge' at which the human sciences have arrived results in the liquidation of the knowing subject. What 'we' learn as human scientists is that each of 'us' is nothing but a node in a surrounding system or network. This is what Foucault means by the 'death of man' or 'death of the subject' predicted at the end of *Les Mots et les choses*.

This is ultimately a paradoxical position, since Foucault's theory of the *epistemès* makes it impossible to explain the fact of his own specific insight into their structuring force, his own election to the position of oracle, as it were, by the *epistemè* governing our age. This was brought out well in an interview from around the time of the publication of *Les Mots et les choses*, when, asked whether his uncovering of the system behind all thought escaped determination

[13] Foucault, 'Foucault répond à Sartre', art. cit., p. 665.

[14] Foucault, 'Qui êtes-vous, professeur Foucault?', art. cit., p. 608.

by that system, Foucault replied: 'Pour penser le système, j'étais déjà contraint par un système derrière le système, que je ne connais pas, et qui reculera à mesure que je le découvrirai, qu'il se découvrira' [In order to think the system, I was already constrained by a system behind the system, one which is unknown to me and which will withdraw as I uncover it or as it uncovers itself].[15] Foucault's response, elliptical though it may be, entails that the condition of his own insight is the adoption of a point of view beyond the hidden system that constrains our age. But because that insight means there can be no such thing as an insight not determined by an unknown system or *epistemè*, he must postulate the existence of *another* system, 'behind' the one governing our epoch, that makes his discernment possible. For every subsequent archaeological 'excavation' of an underlying system, one would have to assume yet *another* system governing that excavation. In other words, this view leads either to a pernicious infinite regress or a 'vertical' proliferation of *epistemès* determining what is possible in an epoch. It is this, I believe, that led Foucault, by the time of *L'Archéologie du savoir*, to abandon such deep epochal determinism so as to remain on the positive surface of formations of discourse and the multiple systems that constitute them.

But even having done this, the problem remains. If, as Foucault continues to claim in the second phase of his career (from the early 1970s until, roughly, 1980), the individual acts of what only *seems* to be a subject are in fact determined by what he now calls a *dispositif*, how are we to explain the fact that this 'insight' was given only to *Foucault* — or perhaps one ought to say 'Foucault'? Why did the system suddenly happen to unveil its truth in the work of this one, necessarily illusory subject? To put it another way: if the system, whether an *epistemè* or a *dispositif* or a network of power relations, determines not simply what can be said (as *langue*) but what *is* said (as *discours*), then how is it that only Foucault (only the texts signed 'Foucault') has put forward this insight?

But the problem is still more difficult. For how can this 'insight' into the functioning of the system even be called an insight? If Foucault's insight excludes the possibility of a truth not relative to a 'history' or a 'regime of truth', whether an *epistemè* or a discourse formation, is this claim also true of Foucault's insight itself? Is his

[15] Foucault, 'Entretien avec Madeleine Chapsal', art. cit., p. 515.

insight the only truth not relative to an *epistemè* or is it only true in a given discourse formation and thus, ultimately, a fiction? The paradox, which is not unlike many others in the history of philosophy, is this: if, on the one hand, Foucault's insight does not exempt itself from its own claim, then, as the theory holds, the subject who signs 'Foucault' is an illusion and an effect of the system. But it also follows that the insight regarding the role of these systems becomes no insight at all. It too is only an effect, an illusion, a fiction, merely one of countless utterances that make up the discourse formation in which it takes place and whose own truth remains unconscious to the theorist. The death of man is then also Foucault's death (as a subject). If, on the other hand, Foucault's insight exempts itself from the claim it makes, and thereby acquires the status of a truth beyond determination, then this truth may as well be given a proper name, 'Foucault's Truth', as one speaks of 'Leibniz's Law', except that the link between the content of the theory and the person who maintains it is infinitely stronger. For in such a case Foucault is truly an exceptional being, the only real subject and the only real man (all the others having 'died' the death of the subject revealed in his theory) in possession of Absolute Knowledge in a world where otherwise everything is relative and mutable. In short, if the subject of this insight ('Foucault') is an illusion, function, or node in an overarching but invisible system, then the truth of the insight must also be an illusion. If the truth is not an illusion, then nor is the subject. Which is another way of saying: if the insight is true (i.e. nobody is a subject), it is false (the insight is a mere effect of a regime of truth bound to change); and if it is false (there is at least one subject: Foucault), then it at least has the possibility of being true (i.e. the point could at least be enunciated that 'all truth is relative to a historical changing system except this one') but deeply problematic, for the genealogist will have to explain this exceptionality: how it is possible for him alone to give a history outside the 'truth' that the rest of us inhabit?

In the end, Foucault's theoretical claim is belied by the very fact and circumstances of his making it. If what Foucault says about the subject and regimes of truth is true, it can only be expressed from outside those (mere) regimes of truth; and to be able to do *that*, Foucault himself would have to be the only subject: one whose existence is precisely excluded by the theory. In order to avoid this unfortunate implication, Foucault fairly explicitly opts for the

reflexive rather than the exceptional side of the two that make up this paradox. That is, rather than seeing himself as an exception to the rule that subjectivity is an illusion, Foucault seems pretty clearly to have included himself as an object of his own theory, seeing his own work as symptomatic of deeper and determining forces rather than as expressing truths discovered and intentionally expressed by an identifiable subject named Foucault. Referring to the interpretive techniques of three of his precursors, Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, he writes: 'Cela nous a mis dans une posture inconfortable, puisque ces techniques d'interprétation nous concernent nous-mêmes, puisque nous autres, interprètes, nous nous sommes mis à nous interpréter par ces techniques' [it has put us in an uncomfortable position, for these techniques of interpretation also concern us, as we — the interpreters — have begun to interpret ourselves using these techniques].[16] Indeed, this reflexivity is in his eyes a crucial component of the discovery of the 'death of man' in the human sciences, as we have seen. If Foucault's thesis is that there is no such thing as a knowledge that is not conditioned by forces that remain unknown to it and ultimately render it false, then to ask, as I have been doing, whether Foucault's theory is true and not itself so conditioned, is to misunderstand the point, namely that, as Nietzsche put it before him, there are no facts, only interpretations. In some sense this means: everything I know is wrong. What I think I have understood to be the case is nothing more than my interpretation. And it is not even my interpretation because 'I' as knowing subject am also an interpretation and a reified construct imposed on the flux of forces both greater and lesser than myself. Here lies the entire thrust of the argument. This kind of position is incoherent and self-refuting, as any number of commentators, most notably Wittgenstein, have pointed out. I am not going to rehearse those arguments here, most of which turn on whether the statement 'all facts are interpretations' is a fact or an interpretation, thereby reducing it to a version of the Liar's Paradox. Instead, what I hope to demonstrate in what follows is that Foucault is not as consistent on these questions as he might seem at first glance, and that even in the texts from the 1960s, when the theoretical 'critique of the subject' was at its height, something like a practical and historical return of the subject is already legible. Indeed, I will

[16] Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Marx, Freud' (1964), in *DE* I, pp. 564–79, (p. 567).

argue that, even in this work, Foucault is just as accurately characterized as the thinker of the 'return of the subject', construed in hyper-individualistic terms, as he is of any putative 'death of the subject'.

Foucault once said that his ambition was to do for intellectual history what psychoanalysis had done for psychology, namely dissolve consciousness into a system of impulses and drives. According to this parallel, 'ce n'est pas l'homme lui-même qui a consciemment créé l'histoire de son savoir, mais l'histoire du savoir et de la science humaine obéit elle-même à des conditions déterminantes qui nous échappent' [it is not man himself who has consciously created the history of his knowledge but rather the history of knowledge and human science that obeys determining conditions that escape us]. In this sense, Foucault continues, 'l'homme ne détient plus rien, ni son langage, ni sa conscience, ni même son savoir' [man is no longer the possessor of anything: not of his language, nor of his consciousness, nor even of his knowledge].[17] In other words, Foucault sought to show that wherever one seems to be dealing with an individual consciousness or an agent, if one digs a little deeper, this illusion dissolves and the subject turns out to be an effect of historical forces that transcend it. The truth of the individual lies in the system of drives and, in later works, the capillary system of power. As we have seen, this project is paradoxical but becomes especially so when the question of the application of the theory to Foucault himself is raised. Faced with such a paradox, Foucault constantly alternates between the two positions it allows: on the one hand, that the 'death of the author' that follows from the 'death of man' includes within its purview the author named Foucault; on the other hand, that the subject lives or at least lives *on* in the person of Foucault, but perhaps also, more pervasively, in a sort of return of the repressed. The psychoanalytic analogy is thus perhaps more appropriate than Foucault intended. The subject repeatedly springs back to life throughout his early work, though as a *symptom* rather than a theme. So reading, we read Foucault against Foucault. For precisely the import of Foucault's critique of the subject was to see every human fact and statement not as arising from an intention but as a symptom of something deeper.

One can trace the origin of this contradiction by looking at the

[17] Foucault, 'Interview avec Michel Foucault' (1968), in *DE* I, pp. 651–62 (p. 659).

evolution of what Foucault had to say about his own relation to structuralism in various texts and interviews between 1967 and 1970. Had Foucault contented himself with saying that structuralism has shown man to be determined by structures that transcend him and that he, Foucault, is a structuralist, he would have been on somewhat surer ground regarding the question of his own exceptionality. The fact that structuralism was a broad-based movement with no single originator, and that it was in some sense 'in the air', is consistent with the structuralist thesis that man is an illusion or an effect. If I, as a structuralist, believe man to be an illusion, I can put forward this insight without contradicting myself simply by claiming that the true *locus* of this thought is in some sense supra-individual: it is in structuralism itself as a movement determined by deeper forces. Corroboration of the structuralist thesis is then found in the fact that many of us share this idea across disparate domains of research, to such an extent that we all seem to have been determined by something beyond us. Above all, the question of the theorist's exceptionality or elect status does not arise, precisely because he is not elect but one of many (structuralists) to have had this insight. Foucault initially took such a line in early interviews explaining the 'death of man' predicted in *Les Mots et les choses*. In those interviews he is not averse to being labelled a 'structuralist'. In his 1968 interview, for example, he raises no objection when asked what political movement he feels drawn to 'as a structuralist'. Nor does he hesitate to attribute his insight to structuralism in general. Nor, finally, does he hesitate to say that the rise of structuralism is the result of deeper forces theorized by structuralism itself. All of this is succinctly captured in the course of an important interview from 1967 where an unruffled Foucault also draws the correct conclusion that his theory is thereby reduced to the status of *fiction*:

> Mon livre est une pure et simple fiction: c'est un roman, mais ce n'est pas moi qui l'ai inventé, c'est le rapport de notre époque et de sa configuration épistémologique à toute cette masse d'énoncés. *Si bien que le sujet est en effet présent dans la totalité du livre, mais il est le 'on' anonyme qui parle aujourd'hui dans tout ce qui se dit.*[18]
>
> My book is a pure and simple fiction: it is a novel, but one invented not by me but by the relationship of our epoch and its epistemological configuration to this

[18] Foucault, 'Sur les façons d'écrire l'histoire', in *DE* I, pp. 585–600 (p. 591: emphasis added).

> entire mass of utterances. *So much so that the subject is effectively present in the entirety of the book, but it is an anonymous 'one' or 'it' that speaks today in everything that is said.*

But also around this time, while still maintaining that the notion of structuralism is meaningful, Foucault begins to emphasize the differences among the various structuralist thinkers. Having noted his specific difference *within* a movement that is legitimately called 'structuralist', by1968 he was more and more distinguishing himself *from* structuralism. If his work still takes place within a 'great transformation', it is now *beside* structuralism and not within it. By the time of the Preface to the English edition of *Les Mots et les choses* in 1970, the rejection of the structuralist label has become vehement and not without a significant degree of bad faith and even dishonesty: 'En France, certains "commentateurs" bornés persistent à m'apposer l'étiquette de "structuraliste". Je n'ai pas réussi à imprimer dans leur esprit étroit que je n'ai utilisé aucune des méthodes, aucun des concepts ou des mots clefs qui caractérisent l'analyse structurale' [In France, certain half-witted 'commentators' persist in labelling me a 'structuralist'. I have been unable to get it into their tiny minds that I have used none of the methods, concepts, or key terms that characterize structural analysis].[19]

However, given the content of Foucault's theory about the death of man, this effort to distinguish his own work can only lead to the paradoxical position we identified above. A particularly telling example of the performative contradiction in which Foucault becomes embroiled occurs directly after the passage just cited from the Preface to the English translation of *Les Mots et les choses*. Having appealed to his readers not to fix him as a 'structuralist', he continues: 'Il me siérait mal — *à moi plus qu'à tout autre* — de prétendre que mon discours est indépendant de conditions et de règles dont je suis, pour une bonne part, inconscient, et qui déterminent les autres travaux effectués aujourd'hui' [It would hardly behove me, *of all people*, to claim that my discourse is independent of conditions and rules of

[19] Foucault, 'Préface à l'édition anglaise' (1970), in *DE* II, pp. 7–13 (p. 13). The English version is from Foucault, 'Foreword to the English Edition', in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, no translator listed (New York: Random House, 1970), p. xiv. It is not clear which language this text was originally written in. The version in *Dits et écrits* has been translated from the English, however.

which I am very largely unaware, and which determine other work that is being done today].[20] On its surface, this sentence is easily comprehensible. It means that it would be self-contradictory for someone who has held forth long and loud about the death of the subject to insist that he alone shall determine the import of his thought or that his will and understanding are decisive in such a case. However, reading between the lines or, rather, *between the commas*, this sentence says something other than what it seems to be saying. Foucault doesn't say: 'it would be wrong for *anyone*, including myself, to claim this, since it relies on a conception of subjectivity that is an illusion.' What he says is essentially: 'it is more wrong for me than it would be for anyone else.' Why? Why this sudden manifestation of *amour-propre*? Such an interpolation only makes sense in conditions that are precisely the opposite of those Foucault seems to be acknowledging: namely, if the person saying 'me' here is the *originator* and *possessor* — in a word, the *subject* — of the theory he fears to contradict. Because he is the source of this theory that subjectivity is an illusion, he above all others must not claim to be a subject. In short, in the very place where Foucault seeks to forestall the charge that he persists in conceiving his own project as that of a subject, he responds in such a way that his own subjectivity inevitably reasserts itself. Foucault's thought here shows itself to be the mirror image of the theory of the subject he so consistently attacks. Where Foucault sought to uncover the symptoms of an unconscious which dissolves the knowing and acting subject, here, in the apparent form of a *lapsus*, we find the symptoms of a different unconscious underlying Foucault's theory, one which, surprisingly enough, turns out to be the very subject that this sentence hopes definitively to conjure away. It is at this moment, one might say, that Foucault becomes a 'poststructuralist'. One could also say that this sentence, coming as it does in the Foreword to one of the first English translations of Foucault, is the key moment in the passage from a French, structuralist Foucault to an American (and even Californian) Foucault who will later become concerned with what he calls 'les techniques de soi' by which individuals fashion themselves. As we shall see, for the second Foucault (and the third, beginning in about 1980), individuals, far

[20] Foucault, 'Préface à l'édition anglaise,' p. 13 (my italics); English: Foucault, 'Forward to the English Edition,' p. xiv (my italics).

from being entirely determined by the system, have at the very least a margin in which to fashion their own existence.

The point here is not that Foucault's saying 'I' or referring to his own work entails some sort of contradiction by itself. Nor would this *lapsus* be of much significance were it an isolated occurrence. Rather, it offers in a particularly condensed form the paradox isolated earlier. I have claimed that Foucault could have avoided this paradox and still maintained his critique of the subject simply by accepting the mantle 'structuralist' and, along with it, a certain determination by the system or systems governing his time. The issue of his election would not arise and a certain internal consistency would be maintained, at least on this point, if not perhaps on the question of the truth of his theory. So why doesn't Foucault remain with the position that his insights are not his but are dictated by the epoch? Why does he insist so sharply on distinguishing his work from structuralism and other work being done at that time, even though this separation adds a further level of incoherence to his theory?

The view proposed here is that, even where Foucault maintained his *theoretical* critique of the subject throughout the 1970s, he had in fact already been reinstating the subject on practical and historical grounds. If the first Foucault (before 1970) is the 'archaeological' Foucault of the *epistemès* and the death of man, and the second Foucault (in the 1970s) is the Nietzschean Foucault of the *dispositif* of power and its relation to knowledge, I want to suggest that the return of the subject in the third Foucault (from 1980 or so until his death), in the guise of the 'care of the self', was present from the beginning. The return of the subject in the last two volumes of the *Histoire de la sexualité* is little more than an attempt to bring Foucault's theoretical stance on subjectivity into line with a resurrection of the subject that had already begun to appear, as a return of the repressed, at the very heart of Foucault's critique of the subject.

The two main reasons for Foucault's distancing himself from structuralism, and thereby reinstating a subject at the risk of contradicting his theory, are, I maintain, historical and practical, even if the two are not easily separated. Let us begin with the practical reasons. Bluntly put, Foucault's maintenance of such a hermetic epochal determinism precluded the possibility of any challenge to the deep forces — the historical *a prioris* — at work within or below human history. If the influence is a one-way street, for Foucault as for

Heidegger, there is nothing to be done. Such determinism seems at the very least to exclude the possibility of a 'politique progressiste': an issue brought to the fore by events in the late 1960s. When asked by the editors of *Esprit* in 1968 whether this did not mean that he was left with the option of either accepting the system or calling for it to be unpredictably overthrown from outside, Foucault eventually came up with a less than satisfying answer which amounted to calling into question the necessity of thinking politics in terms of, among other things, 'la souveraineté d'un sujet pur' [the sovereignty of a pure subject'].[21] Yet this was never the issue. The issue is not whether one requires an entirely sovereign *sujet pur* in order to think a progressive politics. It is rather whether any politics is even conceivable with a *sujet vide*. Foucault's answer simply begs this question, for he proceeds to talk about the relationship between 'political practice' and its modification of the 'system of concept formation', when the real issue is one of knowing whether political practice is even possible and what it can consist in once one has vacated the position of the subject.[22] Does this political practice have a subject — whether pure or impure — or doesn't it? Is political practice something human subjects control and/or guide, or is it merely something we undergo, the motor of which lies elsewhere? To say, finally, as he does, that a progressive politics does not make man the 'universal operator' of all transformations, but that it defines 'les fonctions différentes que les sujets peuvent occuper dans un domaine qui a ses règles de formation' [the different functions that subjects can occupy in a domain that has its rules of formation],[23] amounts to contradicting the critique of the subject he was at such pains to defend. For what else can it mean to say that subjects can *occupy* functions?

Thus, as early as this interview, a practical subject has already been re-established, which will become the basis for Foucault's later politics in which the subject is defined as a kind of subjection:

> Aujourd'hui, c'est la lutte contre les formes d'assujettissement — contre la soumission de la subjectivité — qui prévaut de plus en plus, même si les luttes contre la domination et l'exploitation n'ont pas disparu, bien au contraire. [...] Sans doute l'objectif principal aujourd'hui n'est-il pas de découvrir mais de refuser

[21] Foucault, 'Réponse à une question', in *DE* I, pp. 673–95 (p. 687).

[22] Ibid., pp. 690–1.

[23] Ibid., p. 693.

> ce que nous sommes. [...] Il nous faut promouvoir de nouvelles formes de subjectivité en refusant le type d'individualité qu'on nous a imposé pendant plusieurs siècles.[24]
>
> Today, it is the struggle against forms of subjection — the submission of subjectivity — that prevails more and more, even if the struggles against domination and exploitation have not disappeared; indeed, quite the contrary. [...] No doubt the principal objective today is not to discover but to refuse what we are. [...] We must promote new forms of subjectivity by refusing the type of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries.

One cannot help but be struck by the *wilfulness* of this passage and its vocabulary of struggle and refusal. Where the critique of the subject in the early work had always taken as one of its targets the *will* constitutive of subjectivity, here subjectivity is seemingly a kind of subjection to be resisted by a consciousness and will to 'promote' something else. But by whom is subjection to be resisted, and in the name of what? Foucault calls this force of resistance the 'individual' and refers to a form of power that 'transforms individuals into subjects' and must be resisted.[25] Given that these 'individuals' have the traits of sovereign consciousness and will that were condemned in the critique of the subject, what he here refers to as 'the subject' is nothing more than the collective norms by which individuals are constrained: it is another name for 'conformity'. In other words, this is a critique of the subject in name only. A complete reversal has surreptitiously taken place: whereas the subject originally corresponded to the individual as sovereign consciousness and will, destined to be dissolved into supra-individual forces and structures, here what Foucault calls on 'us' to resist is precisely that sort of *heteronomous* determination. And this can only be done in the name of the subject, whatever nomenclature one chooses to adopt. This return of the subject as the basis for politics became explicit — even where the term 'subject' is steadfastly avoided — in the work of the final Foucault. His turn to Ancient Greece was a turn to the ways in which one can — again, wilfully and consciously — fashion oneself over and against supra-individual constraints. This turn, necessitated by a new assessment of the political and ethical dimensions of 'notre

[24] Foucault, 'Le Sujet et le pouvoir' (1982), in *DE* IV, pp. 222–43 (pp. 228, 232).
[25] Ibid., p. 227.

problème aujourd'hui' [our problem today],[26] is simply a synchronizing of Foucault's theoretical and political stances. What is less than forthright is persisting in calling it a 'critique of the subject' when it is in fact just the opposite.

Which brings us to the second, historical, reason for Foucault's distancing of himself from structuralism and his consequent self-contradictory resuscitation of the subject. If Foucault aims to 'historicize to the maximum', as he puts it, then the association with structuralism at this point presents a certain difficulty. For the structuralist moment was bound to disappear eventually from the scene, whether because of a world-shattering change of *epistemès* or a more mundane but necessarily symptomatic change in mere human fashion. To the extent that Foucault was willing to see his work as determined by supra-individual forces (and his own subjectivity thereby as a mere illusion), he would also be fated to see his theories *invalidated* by the historical evolution of those forces. Not simply that his work would go out of fashion. Rather, inasmuch as it was a product of a given discourse formation and regime of truth, it risked being *refuted* by the advance of history and the move to a new formation and regime.

Of course, in the late 1960s the signs of a reassertion of the subject in the face of subjection were, literally, already on the wall in the form of slogans like 'il est interdit d'interdire'. The desire to fashion oneself outside of the heteronomous constraints imposed by structures and forces beyond one was particularly in the air around 1968. Not only that, it was directly contradicted by Foucault's work at the time in so far as it held that autonomy is an illusion and the subject an effect. In order to forestall this contradiction by events themselves, Foucault found it increasingly necessary to distinguish himself from the (structuralist) intellectual *air du temps* that was clearly already being outrun by events. But he did so in an almost begrudging fashion, maintaining as much of his critique of the subject as possible at the same time that he came to embrace a philosophy in which it is precisely the subject (construed as will and consciousness) that is upheld over and against all forms of heteronomy.

Historical reality has indeed proven quite resistant to Foucault's

[26] Foucault, 'A propos de la généalogie de l'éthique: Un aperçu du travail en cours' (1983), in *DE* IV, pp. 383–411 (p. 386).

predictions about the death of man. As any number of commentators have pointed out, our age, far from being one in which the subject has been abandoned as an illusion, is one where it seems to have strengthened its hold, an era of atomization in which supra-individual systems of all sorts seem clearly in decline and vast areas of social reality have disintegrated. Above all, more and more of reality itself seems to fall to the *will* of each individual subject. Almost all of the overarching systems have come under attack in recent years in the name of the autonomy of the individual, the right to difference, and the freedom of self-determination, to such an extent that a common complaint in Western societies is that community, and indeed anything like a set of shared conditions on human existence, is vaporizing before our eyes. Most importantly, where the critics of the subject envisaged the subject as unfree because *heteronomous* (obeying laws not of its own making), and ultimately nothing more than an effect of systems of forces that transcend it, even the most cursory acquaintance with the current state of Western society is enough to reveal that, if anything, the claims to autonomy and independence on the part of individual subjects have never been greater. Not only the claims, but the reality as well. The contradiction between what Luc Ferry calls 'le décret de la mort de l'homme' [the decree of the death of man] and the unprecedented 'revendication d'autonomie' [claim to autonomy] that accompanies it,[27] is, I believe, the historical and practical reason for the shifts and contradictions in Foucault's thought. The result is the sort of incoherence that we have seen. In a sense, these contradictions are the symptoms of the extent to which Foucault was ahead of the game, recognizing almost despite himself that, far from coming to an end, the era of subjectivity — indeed, of a *hypersubjectivity* that refuses all externally imposed norms — was only beginning. Our age is indeed the generalization of the sort of exceptionalism that Foucault ended up claiming for himself against himself, where thinking against one's own culture and its norms of conduct has become the new norm. Foucault merely preceded us into this new era.

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[27] Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus*, p. 11.

THE RESONANCE OF RICŒUR: *SOI-MEME COMME UN AUTRE*

The hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricœur, though respected and much quoted in fragments, rarely receives sustained, holistic attention in debates on the 'death and return of the subject'. In one sense, this is unsurprising. His key work *Soi-même comme un autre*, while considering subjectivity as characteristic of selfhood, focuses rather on 'the self' ('le soi') than on 'the subject'. It was originally conceived as a series of 'Gifford lectures' delivered in 1986 at the University of Edinburgh under the title 'On Selfhood, the Question of Personal Identity'. Given this academic setting, and the context of a lecture series instituted for the promotion of 'natural theology' (a series inaugurated in 1901–2 by William James's classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience*), this set of studies turns its back resolutely on the themes and problems of contemporary French deconstructionism and engages instead with a range of contemporary philosophic interlocutors, many of them in the tradition of Anglo-American analytical philosophy in line of descent from Locke and Hume.

Ricœur's 'Highland excursion' is, however, like much else in his book, a canny detour. It encompasses in pertinence what it does not address dialectically; and the itinerary here explored, though extremely arduous in the demands it makes upon the non-specialist philosophic intelligence, does in fact address the problems of 'the subject' with a rare combination of subtlety, rigour and consequence. Rather than a focused polemic with Barthes or Foucault, its hugely impressive reflection on personal identity presents a resonance which — gently, but very strategically — invites us to review the terms, the basis and the standing of the poststructuralist debate.

We need look no further than Ricœur's preface to detect a French frame of reference and an unspoken, but pointed, contemporary relevance. What others have called the 'death of the subject' is here implicitly situated within its cultural context: it is seen to echo the much

older 'quarrel of the *Cogito*', which Ricœur views as having dominated Western thought since Descartes.[1] During this entire period, the leading connotations invoked by the notion of the 'self' (*soi-même*) were those established by the 'philosophies du sujet', i.e. by speculative rational constructions formulated by a reflexive, self-enunciating first-person subject (whether conceived as empirical or as transcendental). The constant will and tendency of such philosophies, Ricœur suggests, is epitomized by the hyperbolic doubt that precedes and, paradoxically, prepares Descartes's *cogito*: namely, to make the discursive 'I' ultimately self-founding, an entity established and justified by its own act of self-seizure. What is at stake in the 'quarrel' of the *cogito* is, consequently, an estimate of the worth and ultimacy of this foundation, hence also of the autonomy which is legitimately attributable to the self-apprehending and self-positing subject. Ricœur shows in respect of these questions, that, in practice, overestimation and underestimation have constantly fed on each other, so that the reflexively self-founding 'subject' of Western anthropocentric humanism has been alternately exalted and humiliated.

Just as Descartes inaugurates the era of the 'exalted' *cogito*, Nietzsche is seen to have ushered in the era of the 'broken' *cogito*. He it is who radically undoes philosophy's pretension to set itself up as a foundational discipline rooted in the thinking ego. He flushes out its hidden rhetorical strategies, previously overlooked or kept out of sight in the name of the immediacy of self-apprehension; he observes the functioning of language and its figurative character; he phenomenalizes the inner world and makes it dependent on external causality; he revokes the fiction called 'thought' and evacuates the substratum of subjectivity in which the acts of thought originate: there is no 'substance' beneath the *cogito* and no 'cause' behind it — these are simply grammatically induced reflexes, adjoining an agent to every action. In short: 'I doubt better than Descartes'; which does not, of course, prevent Nietzsche — quite the reverse — from launching his own exalting overbid in the shape of the superman, the will to power and the eternal return of the same.

The alternatives of exaltation and abasement characteristic of the philosophies of the subject lead Ricœur to conclude that the 'I' is henceforth '*atopos*, sans place assurée dans le discours' [*atopos*, with no assured place in discourse] (*SCA* 27). That he does not follow blow by

[1] Paul Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, coll. Points, 1996; first publ. Seuil 1990), pp. 15–27. Henceforth *SCA*, with page references incorporated in the text.

blow its progressive displacement and radical evacuation, as observable in twentieth-century French deconstructionism, indicates merely that he sees this sequel as an entirely predictable tailpiece (indeed: does it do more than radicalize Nietzsche's critique by marshalling the resources of modern semiotics, psychonanalysis, and social theory?). Such a 'crisis' represents in this perspective a certain 'et caetera', working out the form of an already established suspicion and verifying the deep-seated impotence of 'the subject' to be self-founding. Having started by aspiring to be its own cause, the reflexive subject or 'self' of Cartesian inheritance ultimately expires from its own memory and cognizance. For Ricœur, this signifies not so much the genuine 'death of the subject' as the nadir of the 'humiliation of the *cogito*'.

If contemporary deconstructionism, by its nature and to its cost, continues to 'doubt better than Descartes', it still does so however within the deeper logic of the Cartesian game. It thus shares certain inherited assumptions about selfhood and personal identity which Ricœur's hugely patient dialectic, in its entirety, is designed to tease out and rethink.

One of these is the assumption of immediacy, linked to an unthinking substantialism or essentialism. We imagine that there must be some unchanging core or kernel of personality which will present itself to our inner gaze immediately (i.e. without mediation) and in which we shall be able to recognize (i.e. re-identify) our 'selves'. We retain some lingering reminiscence of, or hankering for, Descartes's 'little man within a man'. Ricœur sets this aside: there is nothing that introspection, or any other form of phenomenological examination, can observe: selfhood is the one 'thing' that cannot be detected or discerned immediately. That we have, or rather are, 'selves' may indeed be intuited in experience; but it can only be investigated rationally as a mediated or second-order discovery. It is not otherwise knowable, that is, than as the fruit of a patient hermeneutic reflection, sifting, deciphering and re-evaluating first-order discourses, experiences and insights.

Ricœur's own procedure, for this reason, will involve the attempt to rethink and reinterpret the discourses articulating those observable functions in which 'the self' is secretly implied as subject of the verb. His effort of decipherment always seeks to determine just how such declared predicates 'attest' the implied 'subject' or 'self'. ('Attestation' is one of Ricœur's key concepts: it is the alethic — i.e. 'truth-telling' — modality appropriate to the nature of this enquiry, and it replaces the verifiable re-identifications demanded in the name of 'certainty' by Descartes.) What

this approach enacts is a process of coming-to-awareness which resembles an immense radar reading or sonar scan. Evolving around the question of the 'self', which he unfolds in its successive implications (Who speaks? Who acts? Who is narrating himself? Who is the subject of moral imputation?), Ricœur sets himself to apprehend and compose an immense play of reflections or echo soundings, all of which converge back towards an invisible centre and origin situated, as it were, 'behind' us, in the 'blind spot of knowledge', and which we sound out, characteristically, only in the form of 'possibility conditions'. At the end of this process or progress, Ricœur asks the question of the ontological status of the 'self' thus adumbrated. In what sense can we speak of the 'real existence' of this entity which we have come to know as the implied condition of our entire way of speaking, acting, self-narrativizing and relating ethically? The overall dialectic of the book thus confirms the concluding remark of the preface: 'le présent travail se reconnaît appartenir à l'âge herméneutique de la raison' [The present work recognises itself as belonging to the hermeneutic age of reason] (*SCA* 38). The central blind spot of knowledge indeed subsists, since personal identity or selfhood is not to be known other than obliquely or allusively, never as a cognitive equation of self-presence or self-identity; yet the blind spot from which the subject emerges is now alive with traces.

A second naive assumption, directly linked to the first, and inherited alongside it within the cultural space of the *cogito*, is that 'the subject' is somehow equivalent to the prime actor of reflexive thought. We are irresistibly drawn to call 'subject' the power of lucidity illuminating the inner theatre, enfolding the phenomenalized object-self. How should I fail to highlight, prioritize and divinize the perceptible epitome of my *res cogitans* in act? The subject-object cleavage organizes for this reason the philosophic dualism of Descartes and imprints its persuasion and colour on all subsequent dualisms: 'I' am a *res cogitans*, to which the dignity of selfhood attaches; whereas I merely have a body, in respect of which my selfhood is a distinct and detachable stranger. Ricœur insists that this deeply ingrained dualistic schema, born of an undeclared idealist psycho-theology, represents a damaging falsification of the entire question of personal identity.

He detects such dualism at work beyond the Cartesian culture-sphere, within the Anglo-American tradition itself. It is seen, for instance, to underlie Derek Parfitt's 'puzzling cases': the unsolvable limit-hypotheses contrived with the aid of cloning, tele-transportation, brain transplants

and other inventions of technological wizardry, actual or science-fictional. The point of Parfitt's carefully devised conundrums is to demonstrate that the notion of a 'self' is inconsistent and untenable. Ricœur however shows that they appear to support this contention only because the hypothesis generated itself obeys dualistic assumptions: for instance, that a tele-transported individual could be transferred to a new situation in time and space, or realized in a new body, without memory of origin or anxiety about his re-actualized identity (*SCA* 157–66). Against such insidiously dualistic mirages, and the ever-renascent vertigo of thought which they engender, Ricœur insists resolutely on the 'corps propre', i.e. the body seen as continuous with the auto-designating, psychosomatic whole of which personal identity is predicated indivisibly.

A third and fundamental naivety is inherent in the very linguistic and conceptual basis of our thinking about personal identity. It consists in the failure to distinguish two modes of apprehending the 'identity' of the subject, each of which implies a distinct, if partially overlapping, logic of meaning. The temptation to confuse them is acute, particularly in French, according to Ricœur, since the French language offers a partial synonymy between *le même* ('the same') and *l'identique* ('constituting identity'), thereby allowing the thinker to suppose with stubborn naivety that 'sameness' is what constitutes 'identity'. The standard reflexive pronoun *soi-même* in French is in this respect emblematic, since the act of self-designation seems here to carry at least the echo of sameness. By contrast, in English (reflexive pronoun: 'oneself') and in German (reflexive pronoun: 'sich selbst'), the pairings 'same/self' or 'gleich/selbst' operate to distinguishing effect, inviting the speaker to discern two separate judgments at work in 'identifying' a human subject.

How are we to understand these two judgments of identity? On the one hand, our identifications proceed according to the criterion of sameness, thus establishing what Ricœur calls '*idem*-identity' (from the Latin: *idem*, same). Thus, to supply an elementary example: my passport photo (known in French as 'une photo d'identité' or 'une identité') allows the customs official to verify that the person presenting himself/herself is indeed the subject who bears my name, face and title. Yes, says the official, comparing face and photo, these two are one and the same — and he lets me pass. This procedure of identification is in fact a confirmatory re-identification based on agreed, externally observable signs or criteria (called in Anglo-American theory 'base particulars of identifying reference'); they enable the official to isolate one —

otherwise interchangeable — exemplar within a particular class of 'things' (here: the class of travellers coming off flight AF 216).

Such a judgment, clearly, is one of form, not of substance. The customs official takes only the most summary cognizance of the 'person' or 'self' that is me. He is not burdened with asking who I am in my own self-designation, nor with the question of what my personal identity means or what constitutes it in the first place. I can have no complaint about this: his job is precisely to make acts of identifying reference (so as to isolate and exclude certain undesirable individuals in the same class); and my person does indeed lend itself to recognition by identifying reference (i.e. the sameness he recognizes is indeed one aspect or dimension of my identity). Yet a considerable problem lurks — or rather looms — in the background: this merely expedient *idem*-judgment — external, purely constative, effected in the third person — may, because it is immediate and native to the intellect, come to establish itself as the sole type or model of all judgments of identity, whatever their function and context.

Ricœur's book is a subtle, patient and steely exercise in the discernment of why this will not do (again countering the persuasion of the entire Cartesian legacy). Why should one object to persons being reduced to 'individuals' particularized by identifying reference? To characterize his approach briefly: let us now imagine our customs official in love and about to propose marriage. Will he content himself with an identifying reference merely, i.e. will he simply proceed to verify that his Future Intended is indeed 'the same one' he was introduced to at last Saturday's ball? If he did this and nothing more, we should think him comically bizarre, a victim of extreme *déformation professionnelle*. He would strike us as having mistaken a necessary, but entirely minor, condition of his future happiness for a sufficient and rather major one. Before popping the question, signing the register or making his vows, he must (major condition) get to know his beloved and satisfy himself as to the question: 'Who are you?', this being the key to the further question: 'What are our chances of harmonious correlation and future happiness?' Here, we begin to perceive a second modality and type of identification, involving a different judgment about the Other: no longer an 'objective', third-person judgment invoking external criteria of identifying reference, but now as alter ego ('a self like me, and the other of myself'). Unlike the passenger leaving flight AF 216, our customs official's Future Intended is not an interchangeable member of a given class of 'objects', but an

Other (i.e. person) apprehended in function of a non-replaceable singularity experienced as constitutive of her identity as personal subject.

The conceptual difference involved in this distinction is essentially that between the 'one-and-the-same' (*idem*) and 'the very one' (*ipse*). All three of the ritual acts mentioned above (proposing, signing, making marriage vows) might be analysed as exemplifying the differential logic of this second type of 'identity'. Ricœur himself is particularly interested in the act of promising and what it implies about the self. In essence, he sees the act and function of promising as providing an alternative model for understanding something which we rightly regard as strategic to the entire problem of personal identity: the question of permanence in time. The act of promising (particularly in the case of marriage vows), is not merely a matter of asserting constancy of character, i.e. of remaining identical to a prior essence. It is something subtly and crucially different, which Ricœur calls 'le maintien de soi': a faithful commitment, that is, to the meaningfulness of language and of life, hence also to one's own given word as reciprocally answering the trust of an Other; a commitment in which the self can be — and is — affirmed projectively. Promising, we perceive, gives us to apprehend one of those hidden possibility-conditions which Heidegger calls the 'transcendentals' of existing-in-the-world.

Selfhood in Ricœur's reading is thus seen in function of a differentiating dialectic: that of ipseity and sameness. Not only so: crucially and inseparably, it is seen to be implicated in a dialectic of self-and-other, of ipseity and alterity. Here is a second axis on which to plot the elusive self; and one which transforms the entire question of personal identity. The project announced by Ricœur's title *Soi-même comme un autre* is indeed to explore a kind of primacy of the intersubjective or relational axis, since his constant theme is that the predicate envisaged in this expression ('comme un autre') reacts decisively on its subject ('*soi-même*'). Alterity participates in the very constitution of the self: 'L'altérité ne s'ajoute pas du dehors à l'ipséité, comme pour en prévenir la dérive solipsiste, [...] elle [appartient] à la teneur de sens et à la constitution ontologique de l'ipséité' [Alterity is not something added to ipseity from without, so as to forestall a drift towards solipsism, [...] it belongs to the tenor of meaning and to the ontological constitution of ipseity] (*SCA* 367). Indeed, the deeper the experience of alterity, particularly of intersubjective exchange in alterity, the greater the ipseity of the subject, i.e. the growth in personal identity. (We note here the

dynamic nature of Ricœur's 'self' — it is precisely not an immutable essence.) His title, Ricœur insists, does not mean simply: oneself resembling or akin to someone else (foundational though this is). It signifies: oneself as another, 'en tant que... autre' (*SCA* 14); and even — if we may extrapolate from his seventh chapter devoted to 'Le Soi et la visée éthique' — oneself as Other-related and as becoming Other.

We may recognize here the most decisive departure from Cartesian tradition and from the 'philosophies of the subject' generally. The axis of alterity is what enables Ricœur to break away from the essentialism which is always latent in the rationalist-idealist tradition of thinking about matters relating to the self, the subject and personal identity: 'Notre thèse constante sera que l'identité au sens d'*ipse* n'implique aucune assertion concernant un prétendu noyau non-changeant de la personnalité' [Our constant thesis will be that identity in the sense of *ipse* implies no assertion concerning an alleged immutable core of personality] (*SCA* 13). No doubt Ricœur is aware here of the need to placate Paris-based voices of suspicion; but his main meaning is authentically tranquil. It is not, as he sees it, the logic of ipseity at all, but instead the logic of sameness — i.e. a logic of identification common to both the 'heroic' and the 'disappointed' philosophers of the subject — that engenders thoughts of invariants and essences (hence also, inevitably, the unquiet, reactive suspicion of them!). The self, in his vision of things, is genuinely not defined by some invariance which is held to be essential or substantial; and this is so precisely because it is a mobile dialectic articulated within a texture of intersubjectivity.

We see the avoidance of essentialism again when Ricœur comes to discuss the way in which the past and future dimensions of personal identity are articulated: the model or analogue proposed here is constructivist; it is, indeed, a literary or artistic one. Personal identity is seen as something which is both 'narrated' and 'self-narrativizing', at once pre-configured and creatively self-configuring. It is as if the characters of a folk-tale (who are functions of the action in which they stand) could, miraculously, also stand as authors of the most experimental and unforeclosed of modern novels. This is the dynamic equilibrium that enables Ricœur to envisage an existential dialectic of selfhood-in-time capable of reconciling, on the one hand, the ever-problematic character of the *ipse* at the level of narrativity or narratibility (the level of sense-making) and, on the other, its assertive character at the ethical level (the level of self-commitment): 'Comment dire à la fois

"Qui suis-je?" et "me voici!"?' [How to say at one and the same time 'Who am I?' and 'Here I am!'?] (*SCA* 197). The same avoidance of essentialism can be discerned once more in his final chapter, where he questions the ontological status of the 'self' and opts for a variant of the Aristotelian model distinguishing 'act' and 'potency': this makes the self, in ontological terms, a sort of grounded capacity in process of actualization, i.e. a form of genesis or coming-to-be.

Overall, Ricœur's thought, though it most certainly establishes that the subject 'matters', forecloses nothing in the matter of the subject. It would be unjust, for this reason, to limit our account of the resonance of Ricœur to what his book actually says. Resonance, after all, is a matter of homophonic echos which amplify, answer or harmonically enrich the signal emitted. What is striking to the reader of *Soi-même comme un autre* is the way in which the imaginative writers of twentieth-century France, who have also thought that the subject mattered and have wrestled with many of the issues of Ricœur's book, do indeed resonate in frequency with his insights. Characteristically, though not always, they subscribe, as analysts and theorists, to the logic of *idem*-recognition (which is to say that they stand culturally in the heritage of Descartes and in the posterity of the philosophies of the subject). Nevertheless, in their creative practice of writing, they in fact invoke, often enough, the same distinctions and *ipse*-recognitions as Ricœur. To adapt Lacan's remark: 'l'artiste s'avère savoir sans moi ce que j'enseigne' [The artist turns out to know without me what I teach].[2]

While it would be misguided simply to attribute to Ricœur whatever resonances we find in them, it may well be that their re-echoings complete his radar scan and help us recognize the *arrière-pays*, the hinterland from which his own thought emerges.

Paul Valéry is a paradigmatic case. M. Teste, mythical hero of Valéry's intellectual beginnings, is both a radicalized embodiment of the *Cogito* and, on a heroic scale, a modern analytic rethinker and reshaper of the 'philosophies of the subject'. His very name (Latin: *testis*, witness) proclaims him master of the theatre of reflexive self-awareness, something symbolically represented in *La Soirée avec Monsieur Teste*

[2] See A. Ménard, 'Place des références à Paul Valéry dans l'œuvre de Lacan', *Bulletin des études valéryennes*, 45 (June 1987), 45–52 (p. 46).

and enacted in literal earnest in the 26,600 pages of the *Cahiers* (Valéry's working laboratory of morning thought on all 'subject matters').

The Cartesian inheritance is expressed equally in the predominant logic of *idem*-recognition, worked out by the youthful Valéry in its purest and most dramatic form. The 'Moi pur' (the 'pure' or 'no. 1' Self) is Witness: a mirroring power of consciousness separated out from the universe of inner forces and energies (the 'no. 2' self), like a sun from the whirling nebula of a galactic system. It stands reflexively over against the world of phenomenalized interiority, which it observes and elucidates, according to a scopic regime of rationally intelligible self-enfoldment and self-seizure. The animating project of Valéry's 'System' of 1894 was, indeed, to reduce the human subject, considered as a psycho-organic functioning system, to a set of observable variations which would be ideally expressed — 'objectivité, objectivité divine et fausse' — in mathematical terms.

As instrumentalized in the service of this design, the Testian self is conformed to the shape of an algebraic equation in which the reflexive Subject is potentially equal to its own enigma, i.e. capable of attaining a power of lucidity which masters and cancels out the total set of 'identities' composing the 'equation' of the self. The notation '= 0' is here more than a progamme for thinking or a scientific project. It is also, secretly, the emblem of a dream of Identity as conceived in mathematics: exact numerical equivalence, perfect sameness. In this, it obeys a deeper, non-rational persuasion: that of a latent psycho-theology of idealist and dualist stamp, which is omnitemporal (it is at least as old as Plotinus and Plato). Revealingly, the poet of 'Le Cimetière marin' will evoke his Icarus-like flight of aspiration towards the sun, figure-in-Desire of a perfectly noumenal — i.e. 'divine' — Intelligence ('tête complète et parfait diadème').

There is much else that Valéry detects in the sphere of *idem*-recognition. He tells us for instance about the genesis of the (post-Cartesian) 'Self', seen as an anthropomorphic fiction answering a need for unity and referability: it is, he says, a product of 'la nécessité où nous sommes de rapporter finalement à un unique objet toujours le *même* toutes choses' [the necessity of having to relate everything back, in the end, to a single object, always the same].[3] In much the same way, the

[3] Paul Valéry, *Cahiers*, 29 vols (Paris: CNRS, 1957–61), IX, p. 65. Henceforth *C*, followed by volume number, with page references incorporated in the text.

'generalized Self' we call 'God' is said by Valéry — in a formula which might describe half of Western metaphysics and not a little of what has sometimes passed for 'religion' — to effect a suspect 'clôture imaginaire des choses' [imaginary closure of things] (*C* IX 235). Yet, in both cases, the image is an idol: it is an 'identifying reference' of dubious referential value, grasped at for our own convenience.

Conversely, the refusal to recognize oneself in a limited or contingent persona — i.e. to refuse *idem*-identification in the form of any image whatever — is seen by Valéry as a powerful and important spring in the dialectics of selfhood. Thus, he considers the empirical individual, even as designated by his own identifying reference, not to be the true self:

> Narcisse — la confrontation du Moi et de la Personnalité. Le conflit du souvenir, du nom, des habitudes, des penchants, de la forme mirée, de l'être arrêté, fixé, inscrit — de l'histoire, du particulier avec le centre universel, la capacité de changement, la jeunesse éternelle de l'oubli, le Protée. (*C* IV 181)
>
> Narcissus — the confrontation between the 'I' and the Personality. The conflict between memory, name, habits, inclinations, one's mirrored form, one's arrested, fixed, inscribed being — one's history, one's particularity — and the universal centre, the capacity for change, the eternal youth of forgetting, Proteus.

The 'personality' figures here as the 'negated other' of myself, while the real 'I' or 'Moi pur' places our true identity elsewhere and beyond in the very act of recognizing and rejecting all particularity; it restores, that is, to selfhood a character of free potentiality, open dynamism, human transcendence. Always, the Valéryan intuition of 'le moi pur' is of a presence-absence, which, in its allusive flight, points enigmatically to a state or condition of selfhood more 'real' than any realized actuality: 'Je ne puis me reconnaître dans une figure finie. Et Moi s'enfuit toujours de ma personne que cependant il imprime ou dessine en la fuyant' [I cannot recognize myself in any finite figuration. And the 'I' flees ever away from my person, which it however imprints or contours in its flight] (*C* IV 392).

The alterity within is experienced also in another, more creative mode distinguished by Ricœur: that of the gap or wound in self-mastery which fissures the sameness of the Same and allows another instance or voice to speak creatively in the place of the subject. This is an amazingly prescient account of the experience of creativity evoked in *La Jeune Parque* (and again in 'La Pythie'):

Dieux! Dans ma lourde plaie une secrète sœur
Brûle, qui se préfère à l'extrême attentive![4]

Heavens! in my grievous wound, a secret sister
Burns, reaching forward, attentive to the extreme!

We know from the study of Valéry's manuscripts that this feminine Other within represents an unsuspected *alter ego*, a self of feeling possessed by primitive energies emanating from the deeper psyche. M. Teste had sought to objectify and control his veiled mystico-erotic persona, only to discover her subterranean vigour covertly directing the *itinerarium mentis* itself. The discovery of this 'secret narrative' produces a dislocation of the scopic regime of the *Cahiers*, permitting and requiring Valéry's plenary return to poetic voice. It determines, in fact, that crucial Valéryan 'narrative moment' which is *La Jeune Parque*. Here, the voice of the 'rediscovered Other' rises up in radical dispossession of all *idem*-recognition, faithful only to a brute sense of *ipse* located in the 'corps propre'. Out of the same fidelity, she (and her creator) will pursue the golden thread of voice towards an ideal, highly configured and configuring, 'autobiographie, dans la forme' [autobiography in the form [of the poem]].[5]

The trace of the *ipse* as Valéry pursues it from 1921 onwards involves an increasingly significant intersubjective dimension: 'hors de soi le chemin de soi' [outside the self the way to the self] (*C* VIII 366). Characteristically, this other-directed excursion produces in Valéry a hesitation waltz best expressed in the garden scene of *Mon Faust*. The famous hymn to Living (recalling the supreme 'instant' of Goethe's protagonist) is here executed as a masterpiece of the solitary mind. At Faust's definition of reality ('Je touche, je suis touché' [I touch, I am touched]), Luste however acquiesces with a gentle hand laid on his shoulder, soliciting exchange between them of the deepest feeling of being alive; she offers a higher dimension of contact with reality. Faust hesitates between intimacy and distance, the 'tu' and the 'vous', then retracts, fearful of the devastating 'totality' involved in sexual intimacy and the dependency of the heart. Yet he will consent, finally, to share the peach plucked from the Tree, thus entering the troubling and ambiguous logic of relational exchange.

[4] Paul Valéry, *La Jeune Parque*, in *Œuvres*, ed. by Jean Hytier, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibl. de la Pléiade, 1957–60), I, pp. 96–110 (p. 97).

[5] From a letter to André Fontainas, in Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, 1631–2.

So dislocating, indeed, was this experience of alterity to Valéry's sense of selfhood that the last 'traces' left in the 26,600 pages of the *Cahiers* speak no longer of the relation to another human subject merely, but now of the relation to a named *Ipse* of ontological and religious import: 'Le mot Amour ne s'est trouvé associé au nom de Dieu que depuis le Christ' [The word love has been associated with the name of God only since Christ] (*C* XXIX 911). The interesting thing about the last thought of the *Cahiers* is that it stands outside the logic of self-apprehension and self-seizure presiding over the previous 26,600 pages. It attempts something radically different, an axiom other than the *Cogito* founding subject-identity — or, more properly, personal identity. Paul Ricœur, had he read this unforeseen coda, might have been reminded of the expression 'le Tout-Autre': a coinage of the theologian Karl Barth, seeking to wrest back from the clutches of idealist psycho-theology, speculative metaphysics, and the long rule of the transcendental Subject the originality of 'attestation' proper to Judeo-Christian revelation.

Valéry's plotting of the self, like Ricœur's, expires at a frontier of the unsayable.[6] Yet in both, the incompletion of the *ipse*, and its relationality, are perceived indubitably as questions of metaphysical and religious import. We may attempt a second excursion into the resonance of Ricœur's thought in this direction. In so doing, however, we should note Ricœur's stated view that the philosophic hermeneutics of the self developed in *Soi-même comme un autre* stand quite autonomously from convictions derived from their author's own Biblical faith. He is, says Ricœur, concerned both to avoid crypto-theology, and, just as importantly, to avoid thrusting upon religious faith a crypto-philosophic function, that of plugging the gaps and dissolving the aporias which philosophic discourse multiplies around the 'self'. This explains his decision to detach from his book the two concluding lectures on Biblical

[6] Cf. *SCA* 409: 'Peut-être le philosophe, en tant que philosophe, doit-il avouer qu'il ne sait pas et ne peut pas dire si cet Autre, source de l'injonction, est un autrui que je puisse envisager ou qui puisse me dévisager, ou mes ancêtres dont il n'y a pas de représentation [...] ou Dieu — Dieu vivant, Dieu absent — ou une place vide. Sur cette aporie de l'Autre, le discours philosophique s'arrête' [Perhaps the philosopher, as philosopher, has to admit that he doesn't and cannot know if this Other, the source of the injunction, is someone I can stand face to face with or who can face me down, or my faceless ancestors [...] or God — living God, God absent — or an empty place. On this aporia of the Other, philosophic discourse stops].

hermeneutics ('Le soi dans le miroir des Ecritures' and 'Le soi mandaté') which formed part of the 1986 Gifford Lectures (*SCA* 35–8).

Notwithstanding this characteristic gesture of intellectual rigour, an unwontedly lyrical footnote attests an invincible recognition:

> Je ne cèlerai pas la sorte d'enchantement dans lequel me tient cette citation de Bernanos, qui figure à la fin du *Journal d'un curé de campagne*: 'Il est plus facile que l'on croit de se haïr. La grâce est de s'oublier. Mais, si tout orgueil était mort en nous, la grâce des grâces serait de s'aimer humblement soi-même, comme n'importe lequel des membres souffrants de Jésus-Christ.' [7]
>
> I will not conceal the sort of delight I still feel at this quotation from Bernanos, which comes at the end of the *Diary of a Country Priest*: 'It is easier than we think to hate ourselves. Grace is forgetting oneself. But if all pride were dead in us, the supreme grace would be to love oneself humbly, like any one of the suffering members of Christ Jesus.'

This declared resonance is a significant key to the hermeneutic philosopher's guiding sense of selfhood and personal identity. Not that Ricœur views the empirical ego as 'haïssable' (he no doubt sees the temptation of self-loathing as a variation on the theme of 'exaltation and abasement'); rather, the entire 'ethical' dimension of *Soi-même comme un autre* implies that our empirical persona is simply not yet the ultimately recognizable *ipse* which it has the potential to become; and that growth in personal identity is always a process of creative transmutation, worked out in the fiction-like 'narrativization' of our lives, through the mediation of other-relationships. (This is perhaps the only first-order assertion to emerge from an otherwise carefully maintained and necessarily non-specific second-order discourse on 'the *ipse*').

It is just this pattern that Bernanos explores and illustrates imaginatively, from the resources of his own Catholic faith. What is suggested by the final sentence of the first-person journal of the curé d'Ambricourt is that, at the end of the ministry recorded in this document, and as a result of the spiritual travail at the heart of it, the self-narrating/narrativizing subject rediscovers his own person with the same forgiving acceptance, the same appreciative other-centred concern — stripped of any merely egocentric anguish of abasement or exaltation — that he has accorded to all his parishioners. *Soi-même*, at this juncture, is

[7] *SCA*, 36. Quotation from Georges Bernanos, *Journal d'un curé de campagne*, in *Œuvres romanesques* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibl. de la Pléiade, 1961), pp. 1030–1259 (p. 1258); henceforth *OR*, with page-references incorporated in the text.

strictly *comme un autre*: comparable, that is, in intentional status, to any other human person within the economy of self-giving and exchange which is charity; the ego having been both decentred and dethroned in the very act of responding to the other as needy fellow-creature, designated such by the sacrificial love of Christ. Bernanos, in fact, is here stating an unsuspected corollary of the second 'great' commandment: to love one's neighbour as oneself is to end up loving oneself as one has loved one's neighbour.

In the novel, the fictional author of this last thought is a man dogged by an agonized mistrust of his own over-imaginative, highly-strung, impulsive disposition, his social clumsiness, his unworldly lack of judgment. As the *déboires*, real and imagined, of his ministry multiply, the curé's anguish of self-rejection and despair deepens to a point of crisis, in which he envisages suicide. This is a much-modelled temptation in the novel (linking the characters of Delbende, Torcy, Ambricourt himself, Chantal, Laville, and potentially others). Self-hatred here signifies, not just a despair of, or flight from, one's empirical condition, but the impulse to annihilate the very basis in possibility of an ultimate subject or *ipse*. It is a secession from, and a revolt against, the living source of life, love and hope. To be reconciled to one's imperfection and contingency is thus no small matter in the order of salvation; and the curé's final self-acceptance, no less than his acceptance of his own dying or the forgiveness he extends to the parish that has despised and rejected him, attests the work of Grace that has transformed him into Another.

This formulation perhaps suggests the two reciprocal dimensions of alterity which the novel explores simultaneously. On the one hand, the curé's own adventure is seen to relate to a series of *other human selves*, some directly engaging his pastoral ministry (Chantal, Seraphita, the Countess, etc), others with whom he interacts as fellow human beings and confidential *alter ego*, illuminating or counter-defining his own chosen path (Torcy, Laville, Dufréty, Olivier, etc.). Individually and globally — for the parish, too, as a collective entity, has its own spiritual personality— the drama of 'other souls' is assumed by the protagonist, whose own interiority thus becomes the point of encounter and exchange between the two spiritual 'economies' of evil and grace. In a constant play of parallelisms, underlined by symmetries of temporal rhythm and by explicit acknowledgments of reversible effect (*OR* 1184), the reality of the 'communion of saints' is attested, the efficacy of vicarious suffering adumbrated. Thus, emblematically, the curé discovers in his

own flesh the cancer of evil which is gnawing at the soul of his parish; so, too, he experiences the blessing he administers to the Countess reflourishing as hope in his own soul; and the spirit of prayer lost to him is found again by her (*OR* 1170).

On the other hand, and simultaneously, the acting-suffering subject of this exchange with other selves is being perfected in the spirit of childlikeness and poverty, and thereby himself transformed into Another. We might call this the advent of the *ipse*, i.e. Bernanos's variation on Ricœur's theme of the actualized potential for personal identity. In Ricœur's terms, the *ipse* who 'arrives' or 'comes to be' always emerges out of a blind spot of knowledge: an inner place or space out of which the subject speaks, in the name of which he speaks, but about which, directly, he cannot speak. The extraordinary wager of Bernanos's novel is to undertake to adumbrate this process in its Christian form and modality ('I — yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me'), as also in its Christian meaning (the birth and emergence of the saint).

More, perhaps, than anyone else's dialectics of selfhood, Bernanos's account can only be a concerted play of reflection, effecting — Ricœur's keyword — attestation. All the gifts or 'charisms' of the priest — his visionary insight, his discernment of souls, his sudden authority in countering evil, and his gift of exorcism and healing — have this attesting value, as does the verbal testimony of those who describe the curé's strangely powerful effect on them. More strategically, the travail of the *ipse* is interpreted by the sustained metaphor of the bread dipped in wine. In naturalistic terms, this daily diet is actually killing the curé (precisely as does his everyday assumption of the world's evil). At the same time, the Eucharistic reference superimposes a second sense: that of the daily bread of the priest's mass, mediating an indwelling of nature by grace that is re-creative and transforming.

Most signally, perhaps, the country priest's own 'narrativization', in the form of the diary that records and seeks to understand the passive character of the action in which he is engaged, attests the experienced 'presence-absence' of divine grace. Within that regime, it evokes the ebb and flow of 'cette connaissance surnaturelle de soi-même, de soi-même en Dieu, qui s'appelle la foi' [that supernatural knowledge of oneself, oneself in God, known as faith] (*OR* 1129). It shows, too, the protagonist's progressive but halting insight into the process of transformation and emergence at work in him: thus, his obscure and semi-erroneous sense of being 'visited' or his awareness of 'une présence

invisible qui n'est sûrement pas celle de Dieu — plutôt d'un ami fait à mon image, bien que distinct de moi, d'une autre essence' [an invisible presence which is assuredly not God's — rather of a friend in my own likeness, although distinct from me, of another essence] (*OR* 1049).[8] Such prescience anticipates all the novel's *alter egos*, no doubt, but essentially it heralds the self-reconciled and gracious author of his own 'last thought'. We also see the curé doubt, in reflective and merely human retrospect, the 'divine' prescience and assurance he has shown in action. Equally, and more dramatically, the gaps in his record, the acts of erasure and self-censorship, invite a second-level interpretation by the reader (this latter reading focused and shaped by the novel's para-theological discourse and by the sequence of allusions invoking the Christic patterns of the gospels, the Catholic liturgy and the mystical tradition of the 'dark night of the soul').

Thanks to this play of fragmentary glimpses composed in the gaps and the margins of the novel's autographical discourse, we are given to apprehend the true drama of the *ipse*: that of the Christ-like saint whose very reflexivity precludes any final awareness of his own ultimate dignity in selfhood. (This is the last-rectified of his illusions: not before this recognition, attesting the advent of the ultimate Other, is it true that 'tout est grâce'). The *Journal* thus becomes transparent to the progressive emergence of a subject who is both the elusive 'other' of the empirical ego and the 'very one' that the self is called to be.

Not everything in Bernanos, clearly, is a direct and unequivocal encashment of Ricœur's theory: the novel gives, notably, a highly particularized account of the notion of *ipse*, which Ricœur studiously treats as a second-order concept (i.e. without attempting to say positively what it is like, other than by implication of how it is recognized). Whether Bernanos, had he been asked to give a philosophic account of the spiritual adventure portrayed in his novel, would have done so in the substantialist terms inherited from Greek thought, is unclear (Catholic theologians of his time might very well have done so; and he might very adequately have referred them back to his novel!). Ricœur clearly avoids

[8] Critics have speculated on the identity of this 'other': often enough, it has been identified with the future reader of the *Journal* (see *OR*, 1117). This view however does less than justice to Bernanos's own sense of the 'dark night' or his dialectics of selfhood, as understood in the light of Ricœur. It seems improbable he would believe to this extent in the act of writing as constituting the self, or posit some future Anatole France as ultimate arbiter of the 'I'.

doing so: partly because the secularized space of French 'post-modernism' is highly allergic to any such discourse; partly because there is, indeed, no necessary connection between substantialist categories and Christian faith. (The gospels, on the contrary, speak of foundational things in markedly personal terms.)[9] What Ricœur does share with Bernanos is the sense of the ethically capable subject, mandated, addressed and called — intersubjectively and relationally — by a divine Other. This is the singular and indelible imprint of the shared Judeo-Christian matrix of thought; it is not, clearly, something a contemporary deconstructionist would expect to discover at the bottom of his atoms, his texts or his Christmas stocking...

'Ne sais-je pas que dans le champ du sujet il n'y a pas de référent?'[10] Our final excursion brings us back, with Roland Barthes, to a deconstructionist discourse and a characteristically contemporary mindspace. How does the grand 'detour' of *Soi-même comme un autre* illuminate or comprehend anew one of the articulating departure points of the present volume?

If we follow Ricœur's indication, we may perhaps see Barthes's position as outlined most fundamentally by the role we have attributed to him: that of playing out the endgame of the 'philosophies of the subject'. Hedonistically or in quest, he seems to be exploring their aporias and staging their impasses in the form of piquant paradoxes, while in practice obeying a gravitation of *ipse*-recognition which his own epistemological horizons do not readily allow him to admit conceptually or to theorize. True, Barthes frequently seems to be saying that the only genuine subject is the one who comes to exist as a textually realized construct of the writer's *imaginaire*. Such a construct, he suggests, does not represent, depend on or otherwise refer to any extratextual entity more essential or more real than itself. Yet his real assertion, on this reading, would be: *not* that personal identity is meaningless and selfhood non-existent, but that the self-reflexive subject is powerless to discover within its own mirror

[9] See, for instance, how the apparently substantialist 'Logos' in St John (chap. 1, v. 1) is glossed in e.g. chap. 5, v. 19–20 or chap. 17, v. 24.

[10] *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Paris: Seuil, 1995; first publ. 1975), p. 61; henceforth *RB*, with page references incorporated in the text. I am indebted, in what follows, to the insights of my fellow-editor Johnnie Gratton (though he must be excused all responsibility for the emphases given here).

any constitutive kernel or essence, and is unwilling to identify with any representation or image; in the meantime, a 'subject' nevertheless retains the capacity to write of and out of a subjectivity.

Visibly, Barthes's many negative declarations of the type quoted above are polarized, more decisively than he declares, by a certain shadow of Descartes as mediated by Rousseau. They are addressed, that is, to the inherited notion of a pre-existent core of moral personality to which introspection gives privileged access and which writing communicates authoritatively and transparently in self-portrait and life-story. It is in so far as it is addressed to this tradition of naive realism in autobiography that Barthes's elaborate staging of the imaginary, with its ironic framings and dislocations, its injunctions and warnings, has legitimate force: we do not recount and portray ourselves without an act of representation and of textually constructed image-making which must always be inadequate to its object, mythical in varying degrees, inflected by its communicative design and its status *pour autrui* (in short: no narrativization without representation, textual construction, image-manipulation). If Barthes is so provocatively insistent on these points, it is that he is coming from a sceptical-idealist position situated deep within his preoccupation with language and textuality, and because his cultural milieu is so powerfully imbued with the persuasion he is conscious of challenging. Where Rousseau's *Confessions* mark the maximum unawareness of such complexities, Barthes marks the maximally developed degree of suspicion and enacted problematization.

Reactively, he gives us, indeed, something like an inverse hyperbole or overbid (a new, literary-scriptural, variation on the theme of exaltation and abasement). For, on the side of the autobiographical subject represented (i.e. the object of textualized self-apprehension and self-seizure), no referential validity is claimed, and no unified or unifiable entity is said to subsist as referent. All appearance of selfhood is the work of the textualizing subject, whose constructions do not found, of course, a self or a personal identity, but a staged series of subject-images; these have a merely artistic coherence and strictly dubious representative value — and are, indeed, immediately relegated to object-status by their very realization. The notion of a continuity of personal identity or selfhood, both configured and self-configuring, retroactive and projective, which Ricoeur's genetic narrativization gives us, here disappears, its syntax undone, its intention lost, down the gulf interposed between the subject and the object of autographical performance.

We begin to see here in what sense Barthes, despite his anti-establishmentarianism, is still playing a residually Cartesian game. Between self-writing 'I' and self-written autobiographical 'me', there is a disjunction of uncertain and variable tenor which echoes a Cartesian dualism, replicated and verified in the very act of seeking to repair or transcend it:

> Je me passe de l'imitation (de la description) et je me confie à la nomination. Ne sais-je pas que, *dans le champ du sujet, il n'y a pas de référent*? [...] je suis moi-même mon propre symbole [...] je n'ai rien à quoi me comparer. (*RB* 59–60)
>
> I do without imitation (without description) and I entrust myself to nomination. Do I not know that, *in the field of the subject, there is no referent*? [...] I am myself my own symbol [...] I have nothing to compare myself with.

Johnnie Gratton has rightly drawn attention to the enunciative modality of the rhetorical question, doubly rhetorical in that it seeks no answer and suggests something like an effort of self-persuasion in respect of a formerly espoused theoretical position with which Barthes is no longer quite comfortable.[11] And yet this stirring is set within a frame which is also epistemologically constraining. Barthes's autographical practice gives the choice between, on the one hand, mere description, vainly replicating an essentialized object-self and, on the other, a leap into scriptural nominalism, which indeed expresses the need for self-foundation in imaginary (indeed, artistic) mode, but also withholds belief from the foundational virtue of this gesture and has little or no status as ethical sketch or as existential project. If it exhibits the 'field' of a subject, it hardly engages or models a self.

The deeper-lying reason for this posited alternative refers us, once again, to the endgame being played out. 'Self' would mean — could only mean in the post-Cartesian logic and mindset — an 'essence' or 'substance' belonging to what Charles Taylor calls the 'ontic logos' — the notion of a rationally intelligible order underlying world process and finding its own 'symbol' in Plato's world of Forms. The loss to thought of this ontological foundation and guarantee which Descartes and all 'philosophers of the subject' thought they had at their disposal is the subsistent sore place or wound of modern consciousness which Nietzsche designates as the 'Death of God' (an expression no less slippery and misleading, surely, than the 'death of the subject' which follows hard on

[11] See '*Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*: Autobiography and the Notion of Expression', *Romance Studies*, 8 (1986), 54–65 (pp. 58–9).

its heels, in strict reciprocity to it?). It is has the double effect upon subject matters of making all substance-talk or essence-talk an a priori 'no-go area'; and this, at the very moment when it most decisively thrusts 'the subject' into a logic of self-apprehension and ethical self-foundation.

Barthes himself evokes something akin to an effort of exorcism by which, in expiation of the 'sins' of Western rationalism, and 'pour déjouer l'Origine' [to neutralize the Origin] (*RB* 124), he struggles to travel *à rebours* the initiatic way towards 'l'exemption de sens' [exemption from meaning] (*RB* 83). Expelled from the founding order of essences, the subject which survives and returns must, it is clear, be bereft of any categories in which to conceive 'selfhood' or 'personal identity'; indeed, it cannot afford to envisage any, under pain of giving a signal hostage to its own suspicion of pre-established unitary essences and thereby of re-awakening its own deepest traumatism — 'le trauma, c'est précisément ce qui suspend le langage et bloque la signification' [trauma is precisely what suspends language and blocks out meaning].[12]

Selfhood thus tends to become the *notion repoussoir* we observe it to be in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes:* one has no hold over oneself (*RB* 55); the 'I' is without image or name (*RB* 49), *atopos* (*RB* 54), a mere pronoun or 'shifter' (*RB* 145), perpetually sent back to the position of observer (*RB* 84). (Valéry, much invoked by Barthes, might recognize in all of this his own master-theme: 'Je ne puis me reconnaître dans une figure finie...'.) The notion of selfhood subsists, no doubt, residually, in the form of an agnostic, post-Cartesian question: what is there at the centre of the deconstructed circle of my imaginary representations ('au centre, quoi?')? Projectively — since, like all live things, the self *will* 'return' — Barthes seems disposed to let it return as Fiction (*RB* 70). Yet the legitimizing condition of autographical discourse remains that such discourse cannot, must not and shall not be seen to imply selfhood (*RB* 147). The price paid, clearly, is that the textualizing 'subject' agrees to remain structurally imprisoned in the aporia designated by Ricœur: 'Comment dire à la fois: "qui suis-je?" et "me voici!"?'

These post-Cartesian consequences affect the theoretical status allowed to the 'returning subject'. Johnnie Gratton persuasively argues elsewhere in this volume that there is *de facto* in the writing practice of the whole of the later Barthes a significant and progressive reintegration of the dimensions of subjectivity excluded by the earlier, *idem*-orientated

[12] *L'Obvie et l'obtus: Essais critiques III* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), p. 23.

structuralist and semiotician. That the words 'Roland Barthes' figure at all in the title of this volume, might indeed be taken as acknowledging a subject of imputation, however fragile and uncertain his theoretical status as entity. Moreover, this subject, whatever restrictions operate in Barthes's experience or practice of alterity, is not without glimpses of the necessary mediation of the other (*RB* 42, 104). The rediscovery of 'le corps propre', as mediated by photographic image or signature, certainly establishes some kind of link between the textualizing subject consciousness ('Je'), and an incarnate, extratextual 'me'. And Barthes does write: 'Dans l'enfant je lis à corps découvert l'envers noir *de moi-même*' [In the child, I read, quite openly, the dark underside *of myself*] (*RB* 30, my italics); this certainly sounds like a form of elementary *ipse*-recognition, however precautionary and partial.

We can, moreover, draw in that slim intuitional thread. Is it not true that the deliberate stage-management of the *imaginaire* allows us to 'glimpse or overhear the subjectivity which is dispersed throughout the performance'?[13] In whose name is any identity-image refused if not in the name of a subject who shuns all *idem*-identification? Why, in principle, the subtle autographical 'staging' of the imaginary in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*? Of what possible interest is it to perfect a more subtle language of reflexive autography — except to be less unfaithful to the elusive and untheorizable *ipse*? Expelled through the deconstructionist and ex-Cartesian front door, some kind of selfhood seems at this point to return, after all, through the textualizing and autographical back window.

The paradox of Barthesian autobiography might perhaps, then, be fairly stated to be Janus-like, in the image of the text's conspicuously handwritten epigraph: 'Tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman' [All this must be considered as said by a character in a novel]. Whose hand, we may ask, is this: an imaginary character's, a quasi-fictional construct's, or that of RB *lui-même*? While attempting to purge any notion of real or actual personal identity of which autobiographical representation could be an intelligible predicate, Barthes nevertheless enacts in his writing practice a staging of his own subjectivity such that the predication of personal identity becomes in fact an allusive possibility. Such equivocalness is deeply revealing of the

[13] Michael Sheringham, *French Autobiograhpy: Devices and Desires* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 195.

intellectual endgame being played out. Not only so: the more, with Ricœur's help, we refer Barthes's paradoxes to the paradox that is Barthes, the more succulent they become — and the more hermeneutically fruitful. 'The subject', far from disappearing, gains in opacity and in density thanks to the very deferral of the questions asked of it. What we have then, in respect of this subject, is 'le livre du Moi [...] un livre récessif (qui recule, mais aussi peut-être, qui prend du recul)' [the book of the 'I' [...] a recessive book (which withdraws, but also stands back)] (*RB* 110).

For the most part, Barthes's trail of *ipse*-traces remains as untheorized as his sense of any post-Cartesian theoretical space within which personalist recognitions of the self might be possible. The Judeo-Christian *arrière-pays* of Ricœur's thought, most notably, is an all but lost continent. Yet, just as happens with Valéry, his own epistemological and hermeneutic horizons are themselves open to dislocation and challenge experientially. This seems to be the strategic meaning, in *La Chambre claire*, of the 'punctum': the artless but obsessional detail that commands attention in a photograph; but also, as developed here, the fine point of ontological intuition, as irrefutable as it is, in the Barthesian system, non-integrated, anomalous, dislocating — a pure attestation.

'C'est elle! C'est bien elle! C'est enfin elle!' [It's her! Really her! Her at last!].[14] Evoking the effect on him of the photo of his mother as a child in the Winter Garden, Barthes is speaking of — and out of — a breakthrough in *ipse*-recognition. The change of voice, of language, and of insight is striking; it is as if the deconstructionist semiotician had followed the painstaking exercise in hermeneutic distinction offered by Ricœur to the point where the notion of *ipse* had suddenly emerged in a sunburst of understanding and conviction from behind the post-Cartesian clouds. As we often say of disclosure situations, 'the penny drops': this photo attests, not simply the 'individual' of identifying reference, still less an imaginary construct or a fictional character, but 'son être' [her being], 'l'essence de son identité' [the essence of her identity] (*CC* 103), 'la vérité du visage que j'avais aimé' [the truth of the face I had loved] (*CC* 106), that of an unclassifiable 'bonté' [goodness] (*CC* 107) — her 'âme particulière' [particular soul] (*CC* 117). Despite the cultural residue of essence-talk, it would be hard to find a more exactly defining

[14] *La Chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard, Seuil, Cahiers du cinéma, 1980) p. 155. Henceforth *CC*, with page references incorporated in the text.

evocation of what Ricœur means by the identificatory mode of 'the very one', i.e. identity as predicated of the personal and intersubjective Other.

It is a break-through which resounds, moreover, in long echoes within the Barthesian logosphere. One blinks, for instance, to observe Barthes writing:

> Au reste, combien me déplaît ce parti scientifique, de traiter la famille comme si elle était uniquement un tissu de contraintes et de rites: ou bien on la code comme un groupe d'appartenance immédiate, ou bien on en fait un nœud de conflits et de refoulements. On dirait que nos savants ne peuvent concevoir qu'il y a des familles 'où l'on s'aime'. (*CC* 116)
>
> How I dislike the scientific decision to treat the family as though it were merely a tissue of constraints and rites; either they code it as a group of immediate belonging, or else it's turned into a nest of conflicts and repressions. You'd think our learned specialists cannot conceive that there are families 'in which people love each other'.

An arch labyrinth-dweller appears here to have found his Ariadne image (see *CC* 114); and he does indeed follow the thread, through a number of clearings or crossways. Most crucial of these is his decipherment of the 'noème' — the fundamental unit of knowledge — provided by the resurrecting photograph. The Photo is 'co-naturelle à son référent' [co-natural to its referent] (*CC* 119): different, therefore, from other systems of representation, notably the verbal sign. It bears witness to the past in the mode of reactualized attestation: something that Barthes revealingly calls 'la-preuve-selon-saint-Thomas-voulant-toucher-le-Christ-ressuscité' [the-proof-according-to-St-Thomas-wanting-to-touch-the-risen-Christ].[15] In this respect, it adumbrates his own exit from the labyrinth of mind-made meanings and of the infinite echo-chamber of Cartesian reflexivity. Is it possible — after the 'deconstructionist' interlude spent denouncing naive realism, something he now sees as modish (*CC* 136) — to re-anchor oneself to a non-naive realism, a realism transcending the simple alternative of mimetic analogy or semiotic code (*CC* 138–9)?

In turn, the personal subject is no longer suspended 'en roue libre dans le langage' [freewheeling within language] (*RB* 61), but is able instead to engage with what the photo also attests to its beholder, namely, the power of time, the reality of loss and death (i.e. for an incarnate human

[15] *CC* 125. The reference to St John's gospel (chap. 20, v. 24–29) invokes a striking instance of a request for identifying reference or *idem*-recognition applied to a situation calling for *ipse*-recognition; the request is nevertheless respected and responded to in its own terms. For Barthes, too, it is the question of 'certification' that is prior and commands the question of the truth of *ipse* (this order of priority is, again, Cartesian).

self). If Barthes remains residually wary of 'la profondeur du papier' ('ce qui est caché est pour nous, Occidentaux, plus "vrai" que ce qui est visible' [What is hidden is, for us Westerners, 'truer' than what is visible]), he nevertheless states: 'je crois percevoir les linéaments de la vérité' [I think I can see the lineaments of truth] (*CC* 156–7).

Among the 'true' insights mediated by the photographic image is, as we might expect, the alterity of the subject. For who is it in us who is unsatisfied by anything less than the very one, and surprised to find 'the very one' elsewhere than in the looked-for 'one and the same'? 'La ressemblance me laisse insatisfait, et comme sceptique' [Resemblance leaves me unsatisfied and kind of sceptical] (*CC* 160), says Barthes of the photo of his beloved mother. Reciprocally, he recognizes the ipseity of the other. 'La ressemblance est une conformité' [resemblance is a conformity], he says (just like our earlier customs official); but he continues: 'mais à quoi? à une identité' [but to what? to an identity] (*CC* 157). Earlier, the connection between loving and *ipse*-recognition had been drawn explicitly: 'la bonne traduction de "adorable" serait l'*ipse* latin: c'est lui, c'est bien lui en personne' [the right translation of 'adorable' would be the Latin *ipse*'; it's really him in person].[16]

Barthes may not be at the point of theorizing the *ipse* (no more, in first-order terms, is Ricœur) or of rewriting his autobiography on personalist lines. But it is true here, as nowhere else, that the ghost of the 'humiliated *Cogito*' has been expelled at last decisively, in a kind of spiritual and epistemological crisis which marks a point of no return. In the resonance of Ricœur, it is possible to feel that this is what most transforms the *camera obscura* of deconstructionist reflexivity into a *camera lucida*.

The return of the subject of selfhood or personal identity, we may conclude, is heralded in Barthes by a double movement: negatively, by recession from the same (*idem*-judgment) and positively, by mediation of the unique singularity of the loved Other (*ipse*-judgment).

Is there no referent in the field of the subject? Rather, in following the literary resonance of Ricœur, we have encountered the choice between two coherent propositions: that the subject is nothing (as *idem*-judgment in its most subtle, post-Cartesian forms must ultimately conclude); or

[16] Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), p. 27.

else that the subject is 'no-thing' (as *ipse*-judgment indefinitely attests). These competing propositions are to be glossed philosophically with whatever means we, as moderns, can muster. This process will determine the height of the spiral at which the subject returns — and how much 'the subject' matters...

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CONCLUSION: SUBJECT AND SELF

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall...

The opening essay of this volume offered a synopsis of the highly significant phenomenon of the 'return' of the subject during the latter decades of the twentieth century, in the aftermath of structuralism. It traced the reinstatement in theoretical discourse and in the practice of literary criticism of a 'subject', envisaged as reference point, as category and as value. The subject, it was suggested, has returned 'at another point of the spiral', bearing the marks of its prior problematization. It is 'back'; but back reconfigured in ways which tend to highlight its insertion in a network of dependencies. Henceforth it is envisaged in function of its incarnate character or embodiedness; its embeddedness in context; its centrally important dimension of other-relatedness or intersubjectivity; and its 'ongoingness', key to a problematic continuity in time, engaging both the dimensions of memory and of existential project.

A fruitful space of enquiry opens up at this juncture. The rich nexus of problems generated around notions of 'subject' and 'self' is no longer *pre-resolved* by philosophic assumption, yet neither is it *dissolved* by the operation of some underlying logic or system which is held to speak through and in the place of the subject. The returning subject becomes a highlighted question-mark, a point of interrogation genuinely open, as never before: not only to various forms and degrees of empirical re-specification in the light of preceding critiques, but also to a process of conceptual and theoretical renegotiation, dynamized by a sense of significant enigma. And from this renegotiation, the very terms upon which this debate turns, the notions of 'subject' and 'self', are not themselves exempt.

The essays of the present volume have sought to explore this space of enquiry in which the subject has come to 'matter' (as distinct from a representative history of subjectivity in literature). They have done so with a diversity of approach and of result which will, it is hoped, indicate

just how open this field is. Yet all converge in showing the complex, reactive and multi-dimensional implication of subject in the text, in the work, and in the enterprise of writing itself.

Elementarily, this has involved showing a subject-implication in thinkers often taken as escaping the subject-bound contingencies of the act of writing. Thus Descartes himself: the initiator and epitome of the Western project of lifting the empirical ego to a power of impersonal sovereignty-in-thought is revealed in all the contingent ambiguity of his real scriptural project: tracked in his inflections of narrative voice, unmasked in his rhetorical strategies of apologetics and of precautionary self-defence, relativized in the shifting perspectives of self-appraisal that attend his will to foundation and to authority. At the other end of our period span, the in many ways symmetrical figure of Michel Foucault is shown as embedded in the operation of his own deconstructionist suspicion, having neglected, simply, in constructing his overarching account of the conditions of our knowledge in historical time, to apply the conditioning logic of *epistemè* to himself as enunciator of this message. 'Of all people', the early Foucault stands witness to the survival of the subject in so far as the logical space of his discourse of critical theory infinitely re-echoes the paradox of the Cretan liar; and this aporia of reflexivity prepares the more positive ways in which his thinking subsequently begins to reintegrate the subject. We might take from such fruitful insights the persuasion that embedded subjectivity is, after all, a matter of no small import.

Another, more diverse and complex pattern of subject-implication appears in the different ways in which the text models and mirrors the subject who invests himself or herself in the act of writing. In the case of Nerval, identificatory processes are built into the act of narrative enunciation itself. Nerval identifies with Brisacier, as the Racinian actor identifies with Nero, the creative process finding in mimetic role-play, with its delegation of identity, an analogue for the staging of its own drama of creativity. Here is an Ariadne thread of a writer menaced by loss of identity and alienation within the labyrinth of his own *imaginaire*.

Inversely to this attempt to preserve the coherence of a self menaced from within, surrealist practitioners of automatic writing welcome the dislocation of a prefabricated coherence. The practice of plural authorship multiplies the manifold voices of the single ego and solicits the expressive emergence of abyssal depths. What is dislocated by this practice is the tutelage of a 'false' or 'reifying' Subject, the narcissistic

self-consciousness, and with it, the entire configuration of assumptions about author-reader relationships. Yet authorless writing, while experimentally fruitful, is seen to be a form of hyperbolic defiance of traditional norms which ends in multiple paradoxes and final aporia. While it is assuredly possible to assume creative subjectivity in a different way, and to renegotiate the roles of author and reader, it proves in practice impossible to defy to this extent the distinctiveness or unicity of 'selves'.

Adrien Bertrand, for his part, offers a new variation on narrativization as an act both mirroring and modelling subject identity. He delegates the act of dying to the characters of his novel, putting them through his own experience in a series of surrogate confrontations with the experience of war and death. This *mise en abyme* of his own situation breaks down the layers of an outer, cuturally acquired collective identity and engages a sense of ipseity grasped only in the movement of recession which indefinitely regenerates the very question 'who?'.

Marguerite Duras's rewriting of certain 'biographemes' provides a further variation on the narrativizations of autofiction. What is foregrounded here is the act of rewriting itself, pursued through the devices of intertextuality, paraphrase and parody. Duras is seen to conceal the anecdote of the author's life so as the better to explore its most intimate substance, the elusive enigma of the central 'I' – even if the pursuit of an ultimate self-seizure in representation and writing is finally equated with the 'striving after wind' of Ecclesiastes. At stake existentially is the reinvention of the text of the sacred Book now burned, and a cult of the Tree of Knowledge in Genesis. Writing is presented here as a form of self-reading which re-deciphers or reinvents 'between the lines' the lost sacred text of subject-identity and the obliterated sense of things. Duras, we might conclude, makes explicit the process of interrogative self-elucidation and experimental self-modelling by which the scriptural enterprise always, in the ultimate, expresses the human subject's most constitutive need for some hold upon his or her own enigma. We write not because we know who we are, but dynamized by the urge to be less ignorant of, or less impotent in respect of, an obscure sense of *ipse*.

A further pattern of subject-implication to emerge from these essays concerns precisely the ethical dimension of this enterprise and the will to shape and control subject identity. In what sense, asks Foucault, is political practice possible, and in what can it consist, once one has

vacated the position of the subject? Foucault redefines the subject as the agent that refuses subjection. This is certainly consistent with the etymology of the word: *subjugere* meant to put under the yoke (something the Romans certainly knew about), and a 'subject', in the political sense of the term, was someone *subjected* to authority or jurisdiction within the framework of a relationship of power. What is more opaque in Foucault (and remains problematic in postmodern attempts to develop a humanism of the returning subject) is the articulation between the logic of this first sense and that of the second sense recognized by any dictionary, according to which the subject is the point of departure of an action, in so far as capable of emergence to conscious reflection and value-led action.

An example of just such an emergence to ethical subjecthood is found in Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco*. A postcolonial writer unmarked by the crisis-deeps of metropolitan reflexivity and rivenness, Chamoiseau has an ethically inflected vision of an emergent cultural identity which comes across as a dynamic construct, embedded physically and memorially in its time and place, yet negotiating its other-relations, individual and collective, on the model of a realistic and tolerant hybridity. Chamoiseau's vision is set unambiguously within what Charles Taylor calls 'moral space' (the space of ongoing identification and commitment in which the subject invokes judgments of 'good', 'valuable' and 'ought'). Many readers will endorse the sense that Chamoiseau exemplifies a humane wisdom about the subjecthood of collective identity, a wisdom often lost to metropolitan writers. Yet it is also possible to wonder how well his buoyant optimism does in principle, or could in practice, survive the shocks to moral idealism which Europe has genuinely known. (How — and how well — does it stand, for instance, alongside Bertrand's sense of irreducible ipseity as blood fills the mouth of the dying soldier, or Marguerite Duras's philosophic judgment that the subject-lore we decipher or rewrite is, in the ultimate, a mind-generated figment without consequence in the order of things — a 'striving after wind'?).

In the practice of other writers, too, it is not so much an effort to construct or 'model' a value-led, ethically empowered subjectivity that is at stake, as a way of gathering and consolidating, as much as is possible, an existential subjectivity menaced by the acutest passivities of the human condition. 'Le souci de soi' in Foucault and in Rousseau, with its hellenic cultural references, seems to relate to this dimension of spiritual

exercise and self-management in adversity; so too, in their differing ways, do the dream-writing of Perec, the emergence of the saint traced by Bernanos and the last meditations of Barthes.

The case of Perec is particularly revealing here, in that it centres on the most victimized and vulnerable of subjects: *subjected* not only to the resurgent traumas of personal memory, within a moral personality lacking integration, but also to the inhabiting presence of the unconscious and the imaginary scenarios of dream. Perec stands, perhaps, as an epitome of the (post)modern subject: brought back to its most intimate psychic embeddedness, considered in its earliest phase of genetic emergence, dependent for its intuitions of subjecthood and of selfhood upon scrutinizing its own *rebus* inscribed in its own haunted imaginary; yet he is also the editor-reshaper of this dream, haunted still *also* by the vocation implied in the (ex-Cartesian) metaphor of the 'theatre of subjectivity'. The act of rewriting the dream, and of communicating it, seeks to effect a self-narrativization of exorcism and control. What impresses us here, perhaps, is that even the least demiurgic of postmoderns still obeys the vital and constitutive spiritual need to fashion the emergence of his own psychic 'sous-jet' — to become a point of departure, a *subject*.

Other readers will certainly find in the present collection of essays different patterns of subject-implication, and different pointers to the sense of identity that they project. Those highlighted here would appear to suggest three principal conclusions.

The first is that creative writing, strenuously questioned, may be a more searching revealer of subjectivity and selfhood than the theoretical constructions developed from the epistemological or hermeneutic first principles of philosophy, the human sciences (even of that peculiar amalgam of first principles that is 'critical theory'). Is it not, indeed, a distinguishing criterion of 'creative' writing that it is always an act of enunciation, engaging a manifold implication of the subject in the act of writing? Whether directly mirrored, or metonymically realized in the configuring-expressive act of writing itself, the subject is always involved in the texture and the making of the text, which are imprinted, like the lettering running through the stick of rock, with a 'self-signature' attesting singular, often irreducibly personal, agency and origin. If this appears not to be so, it may be that the act of critical questioning is less subtle than 'the more subtle languages' (Taylor) invented by modern writers for exploring the 'autosphere' (to use Valéry's term). It seems

truer, at least, to say that this inner domain is increasingly apprehended as more complex than allowed by previous centuries than to say that the text itself is truly empty of subjectivity. 'En art, tout est autobiographique ou rien ne l'est' is a sound enough maxim, when one once discerns the multidimensional interrelationality of *autos*, *bios* and *graphè*.

Secondly, the most general model of subject-status exemplified in writing is suggested by the notion which so many of our contributors borrow from the ever-fruitful Ricœur: that of 'self-narrativization', i.e. the notion of telling oneself one's own story in order to gain some purchase — however provisional and experimental — on the emergent 'sous-jet', with its enigmatic continuity and elusive dynamism, so as to fashion or model, from the inchoate and fragmentary givenness of self-experience, a unified agent capable of acting in moral space, capable of assuming relationality, capable of growing and changing within the horizons, both immediate and distant, of the human condition.

There are good reasons why this model appeals to so many of our contributors. It shows how the writing subject extends and enriches an activity constantly illustrated in common human experience (here: developing a creative self-modelling present in everyone's actual practice of personal identity). It begins to make sense, too, of the constantly renegotiated passage from 'sous-jet' to 'subject'; here again, the artist or author is a specialized cousin of ourselves. Above all, perhaps, it adumbrates something of the unifying syntax of selfhood, undone by the Cartesian 'pli' of subject-object dualism. The subject implicated in this articulation of 'sous-jet' to 'projet' is never reducible to either term of the dualist scheme; rather, he or she is the potential that 'ongoes' in the very act of transforming configured 'sous-jet' into self-configuring 'project'. Personal identity is no longer equated here with one of its structural conditions: it is no longer configured around the subject *of reflexivity or self-consciousness* which stands as merely instrumental to it.

Thirdly, our essays suggest a dynamic reciprocity of the subject and his or her own self-representations. At one and the same time, the writer cannot manage without images of the self and cannot identify with any of them. It is this dynamic, perhaps, which, most tangibly, attests in writing practice an elusive, but incoercible sense of *ipse*. This would appear to hold true even where the writer's anthropological frame of reference, like the concept or idea of subjectivity invoked, give no warrant, no place and no name to anything of the sort. In respect of Barthesian autobiography, it was possible to ask what calls forth in the writing subject the urge to

invent a novel 'staging' of the 'subject' to be written, if not a drive to be less unfaithful than is traditional autobiography to an experienced ipseity. The case of Beckett provides a closely analogous instance. So does Perec: 'Ipseity, ever unstable, remains to be inferred from a constantly narrative production of the self' (above, p. 133). The *ipse* is always, precisely, to be inferred; it is never grasped as a construct adequate to the reality which it indefinitely challenges and which indefinitely declares it deficient. Yet it does seem inferrable from the reciprocity between dreaming the self and writing the dream.

So much seems clear from the Lacanian model invoked in the chapter on Perec: that of the decentred and dialectical subject, 'constantly reconfigured around a central lack', never finding in closure 'the absolution which would give it back to its desire'. Valéry says something similar, this time detailing, with the suggestive precision of poetry, the retroactive effect of the allusive and metonymic quest for the lost object of desire: 'Et moi s'enfuit toujours de ma personne *que cependant il dessine ou imprime en la fuyant*' [And the 'I' flees ever away from my person, which it however imprints and contours in its flight]. Even where there is, as with Beckett or Duras or Barthes, a (metaphysical) belief that this quest arises from the constitutive and dynamizing virtue of an ultimate nothingness, there is at least a 'pursuit' of certainty about its enigmatic dynamism, a need to approach and to 'reside' within its indubitable reality for the subject; and this quest implies in turn a refusal of all representations, all image-identifications; a refusal operating in the name of *something else*, some 'other' of the self, felt to be more centrally constitutive of subject-identity.

Anthropologically, we may speak, here, with Lacan, of a 'barred subject' (debarred, that is, from Plato's 'real' world of Forms). Or else, with the Christian theologian, and with *Genesis*, of the subject prohibited from claiming possession of his or her own mystery, i.e. forbidden to transgress the defining distinction between created and Uncreated (a distinction which, in this case, *both* delimits the human subject as such *and* founds its potential for relationality). Or else, like others of our authors and contributors, we may remain agnostic in respect of all ultimate subject-matters. Whatever the framing discourse, it holds generally true, however, of the writing practices we have examined that 'ce qui me constitue, c'est ma question' (Lacan); or else, in more explicitly anthropological terms, that 'man is the infinite question that can never answer itself' (Rahner).

Should we, at this juncture, on the basis of the same evidence, speak of the 'subject' or of the 'self'? In some ways this is a matter of 'horses for courses': it is a question, that is, of negotiated semantics, of the tasks and authors addressed and of the framing discourses from which any particular theoretical construction of sense is to be derived. The term 'subject' is the more 'hygienic' of the two terms, i.e. the one most purged, apparently, of connotations and presuppositions belonging to the philosophic traditions of earlier times; most notably, perhaps, of the implication that a 'self' has to be 'vertically derived' (Foucault), i.e. pre-founded and pre-determined, embedded in some higher and prior definition referring to onto-theology or religion, or some other 'essentialism'. It appeals, consequently, to the age of bracketed metaphysics and excluded religious 'depth'; it seems to suppose only the enunciating first person of linguistic utterance, agent of the verbs of the language; and it answers the demand for nomadic flexibility and experimentation, since it can be indefinitely specified in particular, non-cumulative ways, according to context and without commitment to any 'implication' other than as authorized by the evolving human sciences. In all these respects it 'travels light'; and it suits an age of liquidation and re-beginning; a conspicuously transitional — and transitory — age.

Its disabilities, for all that, are real, if less apparent. It may be questioned whether its workshop-handiness or its convenience to ourselves gives 'the subject' any better title or more assured status in accounting for the reality of things. It is noteworthy that contributors to this volume, including those whose persuasion is that 'subjecthood', suitably reconfigured, can without disadvantage reclaim the dignity desirable in an erstwhile notion of 'selfhood' (among them, the predicates of ethical capability, spiritual resilience, openness to the Other), often hesitate in usage between 'subject' and 'self', according to context. What seems to constitute the elementary judgment of selfhood is the very consideration of what *matters* to the human subject and the propensity to view this 'subject', no longer fragmentarily and discretely (for instance, as 'enunciating subject' merely, or as 'cognitive subject' merely) but now holistically, as an entity which is, precisely, ongoing, embedded, embodied, other-related, ethically capable and spiritually alive. This eloquent terminological hesitation occurs a good deal in our volume; for instance, as soon as 'subjects' are apprehended in relation to their own dying...

The radical question is therefore worth asking: apart from the

culturally conditioned and contingent circumstance which leads us to suspect and banish the vocabulary of 'self' and 'selfhood' on the (questionable) grounds that these terms are the monopoly of an idealist essentialism which we are conditioned to exorcise and love to detest, is it not, in fact, notions of self and selfhood that are actually being refigured, albeit under the name of 'the subject'? When one adds up everything that is in fact implied by our tentative postmodern explorations and refers the sum total to the perspective of convergent possibility conditions elaborated in *Soi-même comme un autre*, Ricœur's theoretical move of positing a *soi*, i.e. a subject *of personal identity or selfhood*, may in retrospect look the more realistic option; and his rejection of the 'paradigm of the subject' (on the grounds that is does not escape subject-object dualism) seems a great deal sounder than at first appeared.

The concealed difficulty of postmodern refigurations of 'the subject' is indeed that the posterity of the 'philosophies of the subject' survives undeclared, structurally implicit in the central concept of the entire theoretical enterprise (like a bright new dental crown built onto a pivot running down into the surviving old tooth-root below the gum-line). Whereas what the enterprise logically demands is a radically new refiguration, growing from a new and different tooth-bud. One can certainly envisage *a* 'returning subject', or, more exactly, a plurality of different 'subjects'; but as soon as we collect ourselves sufficiently — or escape the logic of exorcism long enough — to envisage '*the* subject', it is to be feared that the categories and perspectives of the preceding four centuries of anthropocentric humanism, which it was intended to displace, will creep back in via the back door; and with them the renewed cycle of suspicion and evacuation. How then will the mid-century 'purge' of subject-talk stand as prelude to a renewed moment of positivity, ushering in a reintegrated, reconfigured, ethically empowered subject?

We do need *another* paradigm of subject identity, or at least another anthropological space for thinking about subject and self. It is perhaps significant in this regard that our opening survey of contemporary movements of mind finds within the horizons of contemporary French postmodernism not a single reference to what is, arguably, the most formative matrix of thought about subject and self within Western culture: namely, the 'other' source, the other 'great code' (Northrop Frye) provided by the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is suggestive, too, that the notion of an ethically capable subject is often referred in the present

volume to the insights of theorists such as Taylor and Ricœur, who are manifestly 'from elsewhere' in the sense that they do *not* share the mono-ocular vision of sources and antecedents native to the ex-Cartesian culture-sphere; indeed, they will, if pressed, acknowledge the shaping influence on their thinking of the 'other' cultural source.

This does not seem to be a coincidence. The 'other' source offers an anthropological understanding which does accept — in fact, it anticipates very fully — the defining criteria of the 'new' subject: 'embeddedness' (in the spirit-inscribed dust of Genesis and in the whole 'narrativization' of salvation history); 'embodiedness' (in the adventure of Creation and Incarnation); 'ongoingness' (in the prophetic tradition of call and response); 'intersubjectivity' (in the doctrine of the triune God, which places a loving interpersonal communion at the heart of divine ipseity). The sense that personal identity 'matters' in the scheme of things, and that selves might be in some way 'real' rather than a mind-generated figment, an idea or ideal referrable only to the cognitive subject who conceives them, surely comes, if it comes from anywhere, from this formative matrix of culture and thought?

Yet the authors treated in this volume also offer pertinent glimpses of how this anthropological frame comes to be occluded and excluded. They are worth noticing; one of the ways in which the present volume makes good the contention that the subject 'matters' is indeed that it sketches out the hinterland of ideas and thought forms which explain genetically the late twentieth-century crisis of subject and self. Beckett, for instance, refers us to Aquinas's variation on the ontological argument, hence, implicitly, to the moment when the Revelation of the Jewish and Christian scriptures came to be decisively fixed in the categories of Greek metaphysical reason, its destiny mortgaged for four centuries to theirs. From Descartes to Foucault, one could trace the constructions and deconstructions that followed within that fruitful but hybrid mental space.

Such a cultural narrativization, if pursued, might show that the 'empty centre' of Barthesian or Lacanian postmodernism stands where previously stood the 'sujet plein'; and that the 'sujet plein' was in fact the dream of a certain 'psycho-theology' latent within rationalist idealism: the waking dream of an essentialized, auto-founding, auto-coincident, masterful, infinitely transcendent Self — properly 'divine' according to a Hellenic imaginary of divinity. (The Serpent of Genesis operates with a similar paradigm in promising that 'ye shall be *as gods*'; but it is there

understood that he offers counterfeit coin.) All the idealisms, spiritualisms, esotericisms and providentialist humanisms of the nineteenth century are concerned with elaborating the idea of just such a Subject: Humpty Dumpty set high upon his wall. Reciprocally and inversely, the twentieth century brings Humpty Dumpty's great fall, engineered by the entire adventure of necessary subversion known as post-Nietzschean deconstructionism.

The progressive estrangement from the 'other' source which is interwoven with this process (indeed, often mistaken for it) is glimpsed directly or obliquely in a number of contributions. So, for instance, the later Rousseau rejects a Christian practice of interiority perceived to consist of moral self-repression and illuminism, inaugurating instead a performative self-therapy, inspired from Greco-Roman sources. In Bertrand, the spokesmen of the ideological battle between Catholicism and the religion of humanity find their 'union sacrée' in a common celebration of French identity. As Vaissette dies, France alone is, obscurely, transcendent — Bertrand's well named 'jardin de Candide'.

Duras — *nom de plume* substituted for the detested patronym 'Donnadieu' — offers an image of post-Renaissance anthropocentrism in its dynamic of creative rivalry. The Book of books, loosely and untheologically designated a 'sacred text' by Hugo and the Romantic imagination, is indeed internalized, subjectivized, reinvented ('Le Livre brûlé, je l'ai inventé'). The creativity of the artist takes support from it, reading between its lines in order to invent her own identity as writer. Yet this same process also 'burns' and 'mutilates' the Book itself: for M.D., the Old Testament alone survives; the 'curse' of Genesis remains unlifted; and the epitaph of an artistic life lived is taken from Ecclesiastes (the book of disabused and purely secular wisdom which had the greatest trouble in finding any place at all in the canon of Jewish and, later, Christian scriptures...).

The end-point in this ongoing process of rivalry and estrangement might be illustrated from Michel Tournier's novel staging, precisely, a desert island refiguration of the 'subject' of Western inheritance. Pertinently enough, *Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique* presents this exercise in remodelling as consequent upon the 'shipwreck' of a culture. Robinson progresses towards an alternative spiritual identity, freed from an entirely estranged — and, by now, almost wholly 'unreliable' — memory of Judeo-Christian roots; and his initiatic and transcultural progress is predicted from the Tarot cards.

Within the epistemological and spiritual horizons left by this process of estrangement, we may hope, but cannot be sure, that we are seeing something more than a reading of the cards provisionally favourable to the 'return' of some form of 'post-everything' subject. Do the cards foreshadow anything better than a liberated, postmodern reworking of a fundamentally nineteenth-century figure of 'transcendence-from-below' or Eros ascendant? The best hope that it may be so lies in the anti-idealist thrust we have discerned in contemporary subject-refigurations. It lies also in the purging of the multiple ambiguities and confusions associated with the period of anthropocentric humanism; perhaps, too, in the new friendliness between the natural sciences, shorn of positivistic ideology, and the sense of humane value, released from the many forms of estrangement marking our own cultural identity and collective mindspace (the form mentioned above being simply the best buried, the deepest-knotted and the most fundamental). It remains an entirely open question whether 'all the king's horses and all the king's men' can manage to 'put Humpty together again'...

'The subject' is, then, as we approach the millennium (or do we still stand in continuity with a significant 2000 years?), just a little less *atopos* [without a place] in discourse. Yet its place is by no means assured, its future suspended on our ability to disentangle our own human image or likeness as *selves* from the successive 'deaths-in-representation' ('God', 'man', 'the author') that have marked the fall of the Subject constructed by the preceding four centuries of anthropocentric humanism. The task is now to reconfigure Humpty, which is not to be confused with restoring his girth, his self-founding presumption, or his mural elevation. Still more, it is to extract Humpty from the aporia 'Comment dire à la fois: "qui suis-je?" et "me voici!"?': that is, to restore to him his syntax of identity, his potential for useful self-imaging and ethical self-modelling, his power of spiritual movement and growth (no more mural installations).

This cannot be done without recognizing his place and ours in cultural time and space, his sources and resources, and our own, in moral space. Such self-cognizance belongs to the creatively self-configuring act of narrativization still to be written. In this respect also, the subject — or perhaps we do mean the self? — assuredly *matters*.

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WITHDRAWN

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What can we currently make of 'the subject'? Under the sway of structuralism and poststructuralism, critical thinking took a distinctly negative turn, effectively disqualifying any form of subjectivity as a reference point in discussions of textual or literary meaning. Since the mid-1970s, however, throughout the human sciences, human agency has been restored as both a methodological principle and an ethical value: a phenomenon broadly designated as 'the return of the subject'. Yet the returning subject bears the traces of its problematization...

The present collection of essays explores the ways in which the subject now 'matters', both in principle and in the variety of critical approaches it authorizes. Essays, which are both literary and theoretical in character, cover authors, texts and issues in French literature from Descartes to the present. A wide range of types of writing is examined, from established forms such as the novel to relatively marginal and generically unsystematized discursive practices such as automatic writing and the 'récit de rêve'.

Though it shuns 'closure' in a matter which remains ultimately elusive, this book offers some account of the types of answer which remain open and of those we have learned to leave behind.

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